

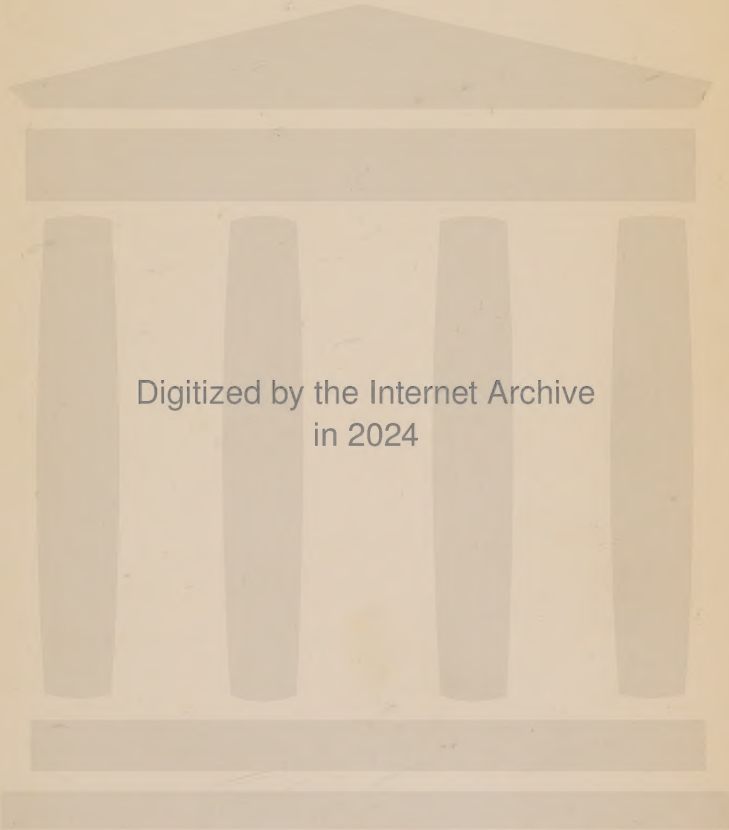
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ROBERT BROWNING
POET AND PHILOSOPHER

1850—1889

ROBERT BROWNING
POET AND PHILOSOPHER
1850-1889

BY
FRANCES M. SIM



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PREFACE

THE aim of the author, in bringing together biography, kindred thought, quotation, and paraphrase in the volumes "Robert Browning: the Poet and the Man," and "Robert Browning: Poet and Philosopher," was to attempt to place the poet in direct relation to his poetry, by bringing together utterances of related value and concurrence of contemporary points of view, which would throw light upon his work and place it in right perspective, as a work of art requires.

To present the poems in chronological order in the setting of personal history and public event; to permit the poet to speak for himself; to present nothing but first-hand report of him during his lifetime; to attempt to present the poet as no feather-bed philosopher, but one in whom genius dawned "with throes and stings," was the aim of the author, however imperfectly accomplished.

The auto-psychical assumption opened the long poems of Browning to the author—it may do so for others. "The subjective poet," says Browning, "digs where he stands" (Essay on Shelley).

"The only difference between a true poet and his poetry," says Francis Thompson in a note affixed to his Essay on Shelley, "is just the difference between two states of the one man; between the metal live from the forge and the metal chill. But chill or glowing, the metal is equally the same."

Browning himself, in his Essay on Shelley, pointed the path by which to arrive at an understanding of him: "In our approach to the poetry we necessarily approach the personality of the poet; in apprehending it we apprehend

him, and certainly we cannot love it without loving him. Both for love's and for understanding's sake we desire to know him, and as readers of his poetry must be readers of his biography too."

Emerson asserts that the only biographer of Shakespeare is Shakespeare, and similarly is Browning the only biographer of Browning—of the secret sources of his own genius. "But even Shakespeare can tell us nothing," says Emerson, "except to the Shakespeare in us."

Browning's selection of the soul as subject for his art, the developments of a soul—"little else," he declared, "was worth study"—was inexplicable to the dominant thought of his day. It could scarcely credit him with being sincere. "In vacancy," he writes in "Christmas Eve and Easter Day," "I pour this story."

"But," says Carlyle, "how often have we seen some adventurous and perhaps much censured wanderer light on some outlying neglected yet vitally momentous province, the hidden treasures of which he first discovered and kept proclaiming till the general eye and effort were directed thither and the conquest was complete, thereby in these his seemingly so aimless rambles planting new standards, founding new habitable colonies in the immeasurable circumambient realms of Nothingness and Night."

FRANCES M. SIM.

DUNEDIN,
NEW ZEALAND,
June 13th, 1923.

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ROBERT BROWNING
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ROBERT BROWNING

CHAPTER I

"CHRISTMAS EVE AND EASTER DAY"

First published poem after Browning's marriage in 1846—Written from his home in Italy—Presentment of two Visions of Christ—Mystic Guide and Mystic Judge of mankind—Appearance out of Vision of great natural beauty remembered by the speaker—Great double moon-rainbow—Visions arise after debate—Organised method of Christian worship—Freedom to worship alone—Examination of three methods of celebrating Christ's birth—Primitive chapel—St. Peter's, Rome—German lecture-hall—The Judgment—Contemporary record of Browning's attitude to orthodox Christianity—Mr. William Sharp—Mrs. Sutherland Orr—Letters of Browning—Assertion of Robert Buchanan examined.

ALTHOUGH not published till 1851, the poem of "Christmas Eve and Easter Day" was probably the work under his hand—the poem referred to in Browning's first letter to Miss Barrett in 1845 as having taken shape. Contrasting her method of work with his, he writes :

"You speak out, you—I only make men and women speak—give you truth broken up into prismatic hues, and fear the pure white light, even if it is in me, but I am going to try. . . . It seems bleak melancholy work, this talking to the wind, for I have begun—yet I don't think I shall let you hear, after all, the savage things about Popes and imaginative religions that I must say."

This spiritual ideal of Christ—the mystic living Christ, the risen Christ, the spiritual romance of Christ—is of the essence of "Christmas Eve and Easter Day"—that romance of the soul feeling about vaguely for a mystic

communion with its own environment, coming suddenly upon the spiritual reality of Christ in the apparent void.

In this poem and many others of the middle period of Browning's life the Christian mystic in the poet clothed itself. Upon that philosophy of the practical mystic the poet rose to his highest in "Saul," "The Epistle of Karshish the Arab Physician," "A Death in the Desert," "Fears and Scruples," "Cristina"; in the two great landmarks of Browning philosophy—"Abt Vogler" and "Rabbi Ben Ezra"; and the intellectualist's delight—"A Grammarian's Funeral."

In the two poems bracketed together as "Christmas Eve and Easter Day," there are pictures of the human mind called upon to face the question of organised Christian means "to make men believe," and the mystical reality of this conception of Christ is questioned by one who would know whether, perhaps, it was only an idea "built up and peopled" in his brain.

In the first poem, "Christmas Eve," a man is presented sheltering in the porch of a little chapel, having been caught in a storm. As he waits, he watches the poor worshippers of Zion Chapel, Love Lane, which is at the edge of a common, pass in. He notes their poverty, their physical infirmities, their distrust of him among them; but, unabashed, he decides to see for himself this mode taken by these people of making men believe.

He soon has enough of it with all its crudities of worship and the unloveliness of the worshippers. He muses outside on what these people firmly believe to be the "call of them"; he wonders at it, and decides it must be because they are built that way; it must be inherent tendency to believe, just as he has inherent tendency to make music, because the musical capacity was implanted in him; so perhaps it is only the fact, "'Tis the taught already that profits by teaching."

He questions this mode of worship; he remembers how in youth he found God in the skies, saw

“ power and equal evidence
That his love, there too, was the nobler dower;
For the loving worm within the clod
Were diviner than a loveless God.”

He debates this question of the Power and the Love of God : is it reality? He soliloquises upon the machinery of the brain given to man to compass perceptions with ; he decides as to himself :

“ To let men keep their ways
Of seeking thee in a narrow shrine—
Be this my way! And this is mine!”

He is filled with joy at his freedom from the forms and narrow shrines of organised worship :

“ Oh, let men keep their ways
Of seeking thee in a narrow shrine—
Be this my way! And this is mine!”

When suddenly the sky filled :

“ North and South and East lay ready
For a glorious thing that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them and stood steady.
'Twas a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
It rose, distinctly at the base
With its seven proper colours chorded,
Which still, in the rising, coalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In a triumph of purest white,
Above which intervened the night.
But above night too, like only the next,
The second of a wondrous sequence,
Reaching in rare and rarer frequency,
Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, flushier and flightier,—
Rapture dying along its verge.
Ah, whose foot shall I see emerge,
Whose, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the keystone of that arc?

With upturned eyes, I felt my brain
Glutted with the glory, blazing.

* * * * *

All at once I looked up in terror.
He was there.
He himself with his human air.
I forgot all about the sky—in the sight
Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognise.
I felt no terror, no surprise.”

The face is shrouded, but the form is there. Even as the Vision shines before him it recedes. He calls after the fleeing figure for forgiveness; begs for mercy for his light words, for his contempt of “the forms burlesque uncouth I left now.”

Even as the Vision shines, the probing intellect of the man asks the why of it; his intellect asks for the reason of his being thus favoured, as caught up by the vesture’s hem, he is swept after this Apparition of Christ.

He analyses the why of this favour, and in tracking the thought loses the salvation of the vest. He pleads for mercy; he feels the cleansing fire; catches the hem of the garment again:

“So lay I, saturate with brightness.”

And when senses settled he found his body

“caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the Vesture’s amplitude. . . .”

Again the busy intellect questions the why of this favour to him: was it for the cup of cold water given for his sake, because he proffered his heart

“With true love trembling at the brim,
He suffers me to follow him.”

And so they crossed the world to Rome, and stopped at

“The whole Basilica alive with men,
All famishing in expectation
Of the main-altar’s consummation.”

“CHRISTMAS EVE AND EASTER DAY” 17

Across the world he has followed in the wake of this
Vision of Christ :

“ As a path were hollowed,
And a man went weltering through the ocean.”

Across the world they go to Rome, to view St. Peter's
mode of making men believe. Here he decides not to
enter—he waits on the threshold alone, but, holding the
“ garment's extreme fold,” he speculates upon the mode
of worship going on inside. His head disallows the “ gross
yoke,” but heart cried :

“ I will raise
My voice up to their point of praise.”

For he sees, in spite of this clinging to the infantine :

“ So many species of one genus,
All with foreheads bearing *lover*.
I will be wise another time
And not desire a wall between us ;
Possessing both intellect and love,
Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere
That my intellect may find its share.”

As he ponders the question of the methods of Rome as
means of shaping belief, he is sucked up again by the
flying figure, and finds himself in a building, the lecture-
hall of a University in Germany. Here intellect, scholarly
and critical, is gathered to hear its Professor examine
whence Christianity arose—how

“ This myth of Christ is derivable ;
Whether Christ was, or never was at all, or whether
He was or was not both together.”

Here, not bidden to enter, he sits on the step, and hears
the lecturer's conclusions, and, debating them, voices his
own belief—that man obtains new truth in believing in
Christ “ Who lived and died, yet essentially am Lord of
Life.” He hears the Professor's discourse, which, after
pounding the “ pearl of price to dust and ashes,” bids his

audience go home and "venerate the myth." The storm begins again as the listener rests in a mood of tolerant indifferentism; the vesture of Christ is swept from his "stupid hand," but he caught at the flying robe, and, unrepelled,

"Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
With warmth and wonder and delight,
God's mercy being infinite."

And "out of the wandering world of rain," he finds himself swept

"Into the little chapel again."

Was it all a dream? he asks himself. Did he go to sleep? He is in the chapel: had he never left it? he queries. But how else have

"Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,
Or the laboratory of the Professor!
For the Vision, that was true, I wist,
True as that heaven and earth exist."

But these are the queer worshippers of Love Lane Zion Chapel—and the sermon, "Unless I heard it, could I have judged it?" This gesture, the subject-matter that lacked logic, the English ungrammatic. . . . Yet he concludes it is:

"Better have knelt at the poorest stream
That trickles in pain from the straitest rift!
For the less or the more is all God's gift.
It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel, holding treasure
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure?"

"And let us hope
That no worse blessing befall the Pope,
Turned sick at last of to-day's buffoonery,
Of posturings and petticoatings!
Nor may the Professor forego its peace
At Göttingen, when, in the dusk
Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase,

“CHRISTMAS EVE AND EASTER DAY” 19.

When thicker and thicker the darkness fills
The world . . .
May Christ do for him what no mere man shall,
And stand confessed as the God of salvation!”

Will the Professor at Göttingen, he asks, take his verdict from him in tears, or laughter?

“ Meantime . . . I choose here!
And refer myself to Thee, instead of him;
Who head and heart alike discernest,
Looking below light speech we utter,
When frothy spume and frequent sputter
Prove that the soul’s depths boil in earnest!”

So he puts up pencil and joins chorus of the seventeenth hymn of Whitfield’s Collection, to conclude with the Doxology.

The poem of “Easter Day” begins with the confession from a man of faith “how hard it is to be a Christian.”

A dialogue is being carried on between the man of faith and the sceptic. The sceptic agrees that to be a Christian is very difficult; if Christianity could support its claims with some practical proof of the existence of the points it hangs so much on, belief would be easy:

“ How comforting a point it were
To find some mummy scrap declare
There lived a Moses! Better still,
Prove Jonah’s whale translatable
Into some quicksand of the seas,
Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,
That Faith might flap her wings and crow
From such an eminence!”

The man of faith feels the practical difficulties of being a Christian. The sceptic sees the difficulty of bringing the mind to accept the claim of Christianity; it is not acceptable to his turn of thought; and anyhow, he remonstrates, how take any credit for your faith when it

may be a natural endowment to believe or not to believe? For his part, if he could believe any given command was from God, how easy obedience would be! But the man of faith has nothing to show for his pains. The intellectualist has visible rewards for believing in the value of material effort as an end to happiness.

The collector has his beetles and his snuffboxes—his reward for believing in the power of beetles and snuffboxes as the end of his faith. No rewards seem to result from the grasps of guess at the Unseen, and there is so little certainty to pin faith to in the Christian story :

“ That all-stupendous tale,—that Birth,
That Life, that Death ! ”

“ I would remember the Martyrs,” says the intellectual, and be on the safe side : suppose death means but the end of life? Remember the tangible rewards of the collector and the scientist :

“ My box—a trifle, I confess,
But here I hold it, ne’ertheless.”

The man of faith plucks up heart to say he would not truck its gleams away for these : and it all proves “ how hard it is to be a Christian.” And he gives the intellectualist small thanks for taking pains to make it hard for him to be a Christian. He resolves there and then to tell an experience he had one Easter Eve, not from “ mere foppery,” but to confess how Christ appeared in a Vision, which took him past blind hope, or intellectual conviction, to the living factor of his faith. He will tell his story, but expects little credence for it :

“ While, if each human countenance
I meet in London day by day,
Be what I fear,—my warnings fray
No one, and no one they convert,
And no one helps me to assert
How hard it is to really be
A Christian, and in vacancy
I pour this story ! ”

He commences by relating why he watches the night out every Easter. It was such a night as this three Easters ago that he chanced to cross the common,

" where the chapel was,
Our friend spoke of, the other day.
. . . I overwent
Much the same ground of reasoning
As you and I just now. . . . I asked,
Fairly and frankly, what might be
That History, that Faith, to me
—Me there—not me in some domain
Built up and peopled by my brain,
' How were my case, now, did I fall
Dead here, this minute—should I lie
Faithful or faithless? "

" I was ever thus," he says; as a child he had to probe every mystery. He illustrates this idiosyncrasy. As he utters this story of his self-consciousness in childhood, concluding with his old nurse's exhortation to pinch his arm and wake up: " And as I said this nonsense," the sky flamed suddenly:

" I felt begin
The Judgment Day."

Time was ended, Eternity had begun, Christ the judge:

" There stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world—best defend:
' So was I framed by Thee, such way
I put to use Thy senses here!
It was so beautiful, so near,
Thy world,—what could I then but choose
My part there? "

he pleads in excuse of his love of the world.

Christ reminds him of his choice—the world; reminds him that he rejected the spirit's refining influence on the flesh, declined its flashes and gleams, said:

" I shall not seek
Its service further! Thou art shut
Out of the heaven of spirit; glut
Thy sense upon the world: 'tis thine
For ever—take it!"

With transport of joy the man hears the sentence :

“ The world? Hast thou spoke
Plainly in that? Earth’s exquisite
Treasures of wonder and delight
For me?”

The sentence on the worldly is passed by Christ :

“ ‘ Let the unjust usurp at will :
The filthy shall be filthy still.’ ”

The trust of the man in natural things to satisfy the soul is steadily broken by the voice of Christ. In despair he cries :

“ Henceforth my part
Be less with nature than with art!
Italy’s painting—there my choice
Shall fix!”

The voice of Christ recapitulates the strivings of Art to reproduce beauty, with thirst never satisfied :

“ Titanically infantine,
Laid at the breast of the Divine.”

Taxed, like omnipotence, to furnish the soul with all it asks, Art busies itself to give completeness to what is but transient stuff. This beauty of the visible world, which to God is but enough “ to house men’s soul in,” this man sees now, immeasurable as it is, but as the lizard in his “ chambered rock.”

As the satisfactions in Art are dispelled, the man’s cry rises in anguish :

“ Mind, the mind, is best—
I will seize mind, forego the rest.”

He decides for mind, science, philosophy, history, verse, music—the last fine resource of mind which half breaks earth’s bond.

All this is still of earth, he knows, and now hears the intuitions of poetry and music recapitulated by Christ as insufficient :

“Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
Which pull the more into the less,
Making the finite comprehend
Infinity.”

The case against mere knowledge ends; it is still of earth. The man “catches no more at broken reeds,” and exclaims: “I let the world go, and take love.”

To him love seemed so supreme a choice, that the threatened doom of disapprobation in Christ’s attitude which appeared at this, sent him cowering to the ground in consternation as the voice in wrath began: “Is this thy final choice?” By this accusing voice he learned that even the love he had chosen was wrong, as being still of the earth: the love that lay around and about earth’s loves, to clasp the soul of man to Love itself, was unacknowledged:

“Thy soul
Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
Still set deliberate aside
His love!—Now take love! . . . Haste to take
The show of love for the name’s sake,
Remembering every moment Who,
Beside creating thee unto
These ends, and these for thee, was said
To undergo death in thy stead
In flesh like thine: so ran the tale.
What doubt in thee could countervail
Belief in it? Upon the ground
That in the story had been found
Too much love! How could God love so?”

With love the basis of all natural life in each, could love be only partial to earth? Did it look like fraud perpetuated by the early Christians, this Divine Love of God?

“Man thought man, for his kind’s behoof,
Both could and did invent that scheme
Of perfect love: ’twould well beseem
Cain’s nature thou wast wont to praise,
Not tally with God’s usual ways!”

At this judgment the man “cowered deprecatingly,” exclaiming:

“Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
Or grant what shall seem heaven almost!”

Faith of the Love of God in Christ breaks upon him; he chooses it passionately, and accepts the uncertainties, the limitations of earth in this new hope:

“Let that old life seem mine—no more—
With limitation as before,
With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:
Be all the earth a wilderness!
Only let me go on, go on,
Still hoping ever and anon
To reach one eve the Better Land!”

At his unreserved surrender to faith Christ the doomsman faded:

“Then did the form expand, expand—
I knew Him through the dread disguise
As the whole God within His eyes
Embraced me.”

Was this a vision? So the speaker asks as the day broke. “False or true?” Commonly his mind is bent, he says, to think it was a dream born of the wonders of the night sky:

“The shock of that strange Northern Light
Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream.”

But he goes through life, he says, holding to his dream of a reality for his faith born of that vision: through this sight he goes through life, rejecting, proving, struggling, glad to be alive, fighting in life's arena, happy that he can

“Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
Thank God, she still each method tries
To catch me. . . .

Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said!

. . . How dreadful to be grudged
No ease henceforth, as one that's judged.
Condemned to earth for ever, shut
From heaven!

But Easter Day breaks! But
Christ rises! Mercy every way
Is infinite,—and who can say?"

"Browning's orthodoxy brought him into many a combat with his rationalistic friends," writes Mr. Moncure Conway, "some of whom could hardly believe that he took his doctrine seriously. Such was the fact, however: indeed, I have heard that he once stopped near an open-air assembly which an atheist was haranguing, and in the freedom of his incognito gave strenuous battle to the opinions uttered. To one who has spoken of an expected 'Judgment Day' as a superstition, I heard him say, 'I don't see that. Why should there not be a settling day in the universe, as when a master settles with his workmen at the end of the week?'—*From "Life of Browning," by William Sharp.*

Mr. Sharp, who knew Browning, and wrote his *Life* of him shortly after his death, gives the information that "Browning would never admit more to curious questioning than that he was a good Protestant and came of Puritan stock. He was tolerant to all religious forms," adds Mr. Sharp, "but with a natural bias towards Anglican Evangelicalism."

"At one period," writes Mr. Sharp, "he took the keenest interest in sectaries of all kinds: and often he incurred the reproach of his mother, because of his normal propensities in search of 'pastors new.' There was even a time when he seriously deliberated whether he should not combine literature and religious ministry, as Faraday combined evangelical fervour with scientific enthusiasm."—" *Life of Browning,*" by William Sharp.

Church-going was not his practice in later life in London, writes Mrs. Orr, his first biographer, but always in the country, or at a University town.

In the little chapel at Llantysilio, in Wales, where

Browning, while visiting his lifelong friends Sir Theodore and Lady Martin, spent every "starry Sunday evening at the little church leading to the 'House Beautiful,'" is the first memorial raised to the memory of Browning, placed there by Lady Martin.

In a letter to an unknown correspondent who wrote gratefully to him, for his strengthening of her faith in religion and a future life, he replied :

"Dear Friend," wrote Browning to the dying lady, who had referred to him as a person gifted with genius, ". . . for your sake I would wish it to be true that I had so much of 'genius' as to permit the testimony of an especially privileged insight to come in aid of the ordinary argument. For I know I myself have been aware of the communication of something more subtle than a ratiocinative process when the convictions of 'genius' have thrilled my soul to its depths, as when Napoleon, shutting up the New Testament, said of Christ, 'Do you know that I am an understander of men? Well, He was no man!'"

In the letters of Browning and Elizabeth Barrett confidences are exchanged in some letters about adherence to Churches, Miss Barrett confessing that it was hard to answer for what she was :

"I meant that I felt unwilling, for my own part, to put on any liveries of the sects. . . . I believe in what is Divine and floats at highest, in all these different theologies—and because the really Divine draws together souls, and tends so to a unity, I could pray anywhere and with all sorts of worshippers from the Sistine Chapel to Mr. Fox's, those kneeling and those standing. Wherever you go, in all religious societies, there is a little to revolt, and a good deal to bear with—but it is not otherwise in the world without; and *within* you are especially reminded that God has to be more patient than yourself after all. Still, you go quickest there, where your sympathies are least ruffled and disturbed—and I like, beyond comparison best, the simplicity of the Dissenters . . . the unwritten prayer . . . the sacraments administered quietly and without charlatanism! And the principle of a church, as they hold it, I hold it too . . . quite apart from State necessities . . . pure from the law. . . . Public and social prayer is right and desirable . . . and I would prefer, as a

matter of custom, to pray in one of those chapels, where the minister is simple-minded and not controversial—certainly would prefer it. Not exactly the Socinian Chapels nor yet in Mr. Fox’s, not by preference. The Unitarians seem to me to throw over what is most beautiful in the Christian Doctrine, but the Formalists on the other side stir up a dust in which it appears excusable not to see.”

Browning replies :

“Dearest, I know your very meaning, in what you said of religion, and responded to it with my whole soul. What you express now is for us both—those are my own feelings, my convictions beside—instinct confirmed by reason. Look at the injunction to ‘love God with all the heart and soul and strength,’ and then imagine any faculty that arises towards the love of him be still! If in a meeting-house, with the blank white walls, and a simple doctrinal expression—all the senses should turn (from where they lie neglected) to all that sunshine in the Sistine with its music and painting, which would lift them at once to Heaven—why should you not go forth? to return just as quickly, when they are nourished into a luxuriance that extinguishes, what is called reason’s pale wavering light, lamp or whatever it is—for I have got into a confusion with thinking of convolvuluses that climb and tangle round the rose-trees which might be lamps or tapers! See the levity! No—this sort of levity only exists because of the strong conviction, I do believe. There seems no longer need of earnestness, assertion or proof, so it runs lightly over like the top of a wave. . . . All passive obedience and implicit submission of will and intellect is by far too easy, if well considered, to be the course prescribed by God to man in this life of probation—for they *evade* probation altogether, though foolish people think otherwise. Chop off your legs, you will never go astray; stifle your reason altogether, and you will find it difficult to reason ill. It is hard to make these sacrifices; not so hard as to lose the reward, or incur the penalty of an Eternity to come; hard to effect them then and go through with them; not hard when the leg is to be *cut off*—that is rather harder to keep it quiet on a stool, I know very well. The partial indulgence, the proper exercise of one’s faculties—there is the difficulty and problem for solution, set by that Providence which might have made the laws of Religion as indubitable as those of vitality, and revealed the articles of belief as certainly as that condition, for instance, by which we breathe so many times in a minute to support life. But there is no reward proposed for the feat

of breathing, and a great one for that of believing—consequently there must go a great deal more voluntary effort to this latter than is implied in the getting absolutely rid of it at once, by adopting the direction of an infallible church, or private judgment of another—for all our life is some form of religion, and all our action some belief, and there is but one law, however modified, for the greater and the less.

“All God’s urgency, so to speak, is in the justice of his judgments, the rightness of his rule. Yet why? one might ask—if one does believe that the rule is his, why ask further. Because his is a reasonable service once for all. You amuse me sometimes by seeming surprised at some chance expression of a truth, which is grown a veriest commonplace to me.

“There is more in the soul than rises to the surface and meets the eye; whatever does *that* is for the world’s immediate uses; and were this world *all*, *all* in us would be producible and available for use, as it *is* with the body now—but with the soul, what is to be developed afterwards is the main thing, and instinctively asserts its rights—so that when you hate (or love) you shall not be able to explain why? . . . and the rest is with God—whose finger I see every minute of my life.”—*Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett*, 1846.

It was at the Academy dinner of 1885 that Browning made a remark which roused the anger of Robert Buchanan, who had begun his friendship with Browning as a whole-souled admirer, and had reviewed his “*Dramatis Personæ*” with boyish ardour; but he ended at complete variance with him. Browning’s “No” to him still reverberates in critical circles concerned with the point as to whether Browning was a Christian. In the biography of Buchanan by Harriet Jay, his sister-in-law and adopted daughter, the famous “No” is not mentioned, but the history of Buchanan’s friction with Browning is there lengthily related, with the incident of the Academy dinner which ended friendly relations between Buchanan and Browning. The assertion of Buchanan is in the epistle dedicatory to “*The Outcast*.”

“Buchanan,” writes Mr. Henry Murray in an article, “had a brief period of God intoxication evolving to Agnosticism tending to Atheism.” “It was at Lewes’ house I first

met Robert Browning,” wrote Buchanan, “whom I had long regarded with idolatry. Begged George Eliot to introduce me. . . . Lewes assured me that Browning was so hungry for general approval that he coveted that even of his own washerwoman.”

“Browning had great dislike to Walt Whitman,” wrote Buchanan, “the man I revered this side of idolatry. I stuck up in defence of him: this was the first serious disagreement I had ever had with Browning. I suppose I had pitched my note of praise too high, and so my admiration of another modern poet was resented as an act of disloyalty, for I was then proclaiming Browning as the greatest literary force since Shakespeare. I have modified my opinion since then . . . though convinced that the modern man contains passages it would be difficult to surpass even in writings of the great Master.

“My last meeting with him was at one of the Royal Academy soirées, which follow the annual dinner. By that time we had fallen asunder a good deal, though we never had had any open disagreement, but as years wore on my enthusiasm had lessened, and I was not in the way of being useful to him as a friendly critic. We had only exchanged a handshake and a few words, but I felt that his manner was a little chilly.

“I was informed afterwards that at the Academy dinner, when Lecky, in responding to the toast of Literature, had startled the company by generously and warmly eulogising my poetry, Browning had murmured to his next neighbour, ‘Of whom is he speaking? Of Buchanan, the writer of plays?’

“I was just then collaborating with Sims on a melodrama for the Adelphi, and the question was construed by those who heard it as an expression of ironical contempt.”

Browning’s remark was spitefully resented and commented on, as a mean defection from his old admiration because Buchanan was no longer of any use to him as a critic :

“I cannot help thinking that had I still been writing criticism, he might have been more tolerant of my own occasional backslidings in literature. He eulogised my early work as beautiful with florid emphasis on the adjective. I think he was honest, and I am sure I hope so; but I had powerful organs at my command at this time, and he knew it.”

Browning had not supported Buchanan in his attack upon the Fleshly School of Poetry. Buchanan had heard him speak strongly in disapproval of some of Rossetti's poems, and had counted on his approval in writing the article. Both Browning and Tennyson had failed him here, he thought.

When Buchanan informed Browning that his poetry was essentially that of a Christian, he was surprised, he said, at the manner in which the information was received: "Are you not, then, a Christian?" said Buchanan. "No!" thundered the poet.

Buchanan was, as the Sadducee of old, seeking to entrap. He was an embittered and disappointed man—he had had high aims and aspired to poetry, became a novelist and playwright, making large sums by his plays but losing them by spendthrift ways. He was embittered against Browning by this reported remark of Browning's, which he took as a slight upon his claim to be called a poet. He was angry at what he thought Browning's defection on his attack on the Fleshly School of Poetry. He was in the habit of quarrelling violently, arguing against Christianity.

As to such carping questionings of him and assertions about him, Browning had written to Miss Barrett:

"It all seems so wearisomely unprofitable. What comes of Smith's second thought if you change his first? Out of *that* will branch as great an error, you may be sure—and sometimes I help out their arguments Ogniben fashion, which means Jesuitical skill."

He quotes Goethe's lines to such fault-finders:

"Be it your unerring rule
Ne'er to contradict a fool;
For if folly choose to brave you,
All your wisdom cannot save you."

In a short poem not included by Browning in his collected works, he met Sadducean questioning by what he

afterwards designated a “snarling thing.” Rabbi Ben Karshook is advising a man if he would escape the rod to turn to God before he died :

“ Quoth a young Sadducee,
Reader of many rolls,
‘ Is it so certain we
Have, as they tell us, souls?’

“ ‘ Son, there is no reply.’
The Rabbi bit his beard.
‘ Certain a soul have I:
We may have none,’ he sneered.”

Did Browning aim at being another Luther?
His Art alone replies.

CHAPTER II

ESSAY ON SHELLEY

Important prose work of Browning—Tribute to Shelley as genius of rare and noble powers—Man and poet—Objective and subjective poet contrasted—Divine compulsion of genius—Plea for better understanding of Shelley's aims—Browning fulfils early dream of serving Shelley's fame and memory.

IN 1852 an "Introductory Essay to the Letters of Shelley" was written by Browning. The Essay was written at the request of Mr. Moxon, the publisher into whose hands these letters had been placed for publication; it was written at Paris during the winter of 1852.

These letters proved to be false, and the book was promptly withdrawn from circulation—a very few copies only escaped the publisher, apparently only those which went to depositories of copyright matter. The Essay is a long piece of prose, discussing in its opening the particular sphere of the objective poet, and making comparison between the aim and methods of objective art and the scope and purpose of the subjective poet and his art. It is personal pronouncement by Browning in prose upon the question of the genius of the poet in general, and a plea for a better understanding of Shelley under the accusation of the young poet as subverter of Society.

The opening lines of the Essay state the cause of its having been written :

" An opportunity having presented itself for the acquisition of a series of unedited letters by Shelley, all more or less directly supplementary to an illustration of the collection already published by Mr. Moxon, that gentleman has decided upon securing them. They will prove an acceptable addition

to a body of correspondence the value of which towards a right understanding of its author's purpose and work, may be said to exceed that of any similar contribution exhibiting the worldly relations of a poet whose genius has operated by a different law."

"Doubtless we accept gladly the biography of an objective poet, as the phrase now goes; one whose endeavour has been to reproduce things external (whether the phenomena of the scenic universe, or the manifested action of the human heart and brain), with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow-men, assumed capable of receiving and profiting by this reproduction. It has been obtained through the poet's double faculty of seeing external objects more clearly, widely, and deeply than is possible to the average mind, at the same time that he is so acquainted and in sympathy with its narrower comprehension as to be careful to supply it with no other materials than it can combine into an intelligible whole. The auditory of such a poet will include, not only the intelligences which, save for that assistance, would have missed the deeper meaning and enjoyment of the original objects, but also the spirits of a like endowment with his own, who, by means of his abstract, can forthwith pass to the reality it was made from, and either corroborate their impressions of things known already, or supply themselves with new from whatever shows in the inexhaustible variety of existence may have hitherto escaped their knowledge. Such a poet is properly the fashioner; and the thing fashioned—his poetry—will of necessity be substantive, projected from himself and distinct. We are ignorant what the inventor of Othello conceived of that fact as he beheld it in his completeness, how he accounted for it, under what known law he registered its nature, or to what unknown law he traced its coincidence. We learn only what he intended we should learn by that particular exercise of his powers—the fact itself—which, with its infinite significances, each of us receives for the first time as a creation, and is hereafter left to deal with as, in proportion to his own intelligence, he best may.

"Doubtless with such a poet we covet his biography. We desire to look back upon the process of gathering together in a lifetime the materials of the work we behold entire; of elaborating, perhaps under difficulty and with hindrance, all that is familiar to our admiration in the apparent facility of success. And the inner impulse of this effort and operation, what produced it? Did a soul's delight in its own extended sphere of vision set it, for the gratification of an insuppressible power, on labour, as other men are set on rest? Or did

a sense of duty or of love lead it to communicate its own sensations to mankind? Did an irresistible sympathy with men compel it to bring down and suit its own provision of knowledge and beauty to their narrow scope? Did the personality of such a one stand like an open watch-tower in the midst of the territory it is erected to gaze on? And were the storms and calms, the stars and meteors, its watchman was wont to report of, the habitual variegation of his everyday life, as they glanced across its open door or lay reflected in his four-square parapet? How blindly would have pressed upon the artificer the boundary of his daily life, except for the amorous diligence with which he had rendered permanent by art whatever came to diversify his gloom! The man passes, the work remains. The work speaks for itself, as we say.

"We turn with stronger needs to the genius of an opposite tendency—the subjective poet of modern classification. He, gifted, like the objective poet, with the fuller perception of nature and man, is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below as to the one above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth—an ultimate view ever aspired to, if but partially attained by the poet's own soul.

"Not what man sees, but what God sees—the ideas of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand—it is towards these that he struggles. Not with the combination of humanity in action, but with the primal elements of humanity, he has to do; and he digs where he stands—preferring to seek them in his own soul as the nearest reflex of absolute mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak.

"He does not paint pictures and hang them on the walls, but rather carries them on the retina of his own eyes: we must look deep into his human eyes to see those pictures on them. He is rather a seer, accordingly, than a fashioner, and what he produces will be less a work than an effluence. That effluence cannot be easily considered in abstraction from his personality—being, indeed, the very radiance and aroma of his personality projected from it, but not separable.

"Therefore, in our approach to the poetry we necessarily approach the personality of the poet; in apprehending it we apprehend him; and certainly we cannot love it without loving him. Both for love's and for understanding's sake we desire to know him, and as readers of his poetry must be readers of his biography also.

"It would be idle to enquire of these two kinds of poetic faculty in operation which is the higher or even rarer endow-

ment. If the subjective might seem to be the ultimate requirement of every age, the objective, in the strictest state, must still retain its original value. For it is with this world, as starting-point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves: the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned. The spiritual comprehension may be infinitely subtilised, but the raw material it operates upon must remain. . . . There is a time when the general eye has, so to speak, absorbed its fill of the phenomena around it, whether spiritual or material, and desires to learn the exacter significance of what it possesses than to receive any augmentation of what is possessed. Then is the opportunity for the poet of loftier vision to lift his fellows, with their half-apprehensions, up to his own sphere, by intensifying the import of details and rounding the universal meaning.

“Such being the two kinds of articles, it is naturally, as I have shown, with the biography of the subjective poet that we have the deeper concern. Apart from his recorded life altogether, we might fail to determine with satisfactory precision to what class his productions belong, and what amount of praise is assignable to the producer. Certainly, in the fact of any conspicuous achievement of genius, philosophy no less than sympathetic instinct warrants our belief in a great moral purpose having mainly inspired even where it does not visibly look out of the same.

“Greatness in a work suggests an adequate instrumentality; and none of the lower incitements, however they may avail to initiate or even effect many considerable displays of power, simulating the nobler inspirations to which they are mistakenly referred, have been found able, under the ordinary conditions of humanity, to task themselves to the end of so exacting a performance as a poet's complete work.

“The love of displaying power for the display's sake; the love of riches, of distinction, of notoriety; the desire of a triumph over rivals, and the vanity in the applause of friends—each and all of such whetted appetites grow intenser by exercise, and increasingly sagacious as to the best and readiest means of self-appeasement: while for any of their ends, whether the money or the pointed finger of the crowd, or the flattery and hate to heart's content, these are cheaper prices to pay, they will all find soon, than the bestowment of life upon a labour hard, slow, and not sure.

“All the bad poetry in the world (accounted poetry, that is, by its affinities) will be found to result from some one of the infinite degrees of discrepancy between the attributes of the poet's soul: occasionally a want of correspondence

between his work and the varieties of nature issuing in poetry, false under whatever form, which shows a thing, not as it is to mankind generally, nor as it is to the particular describer, but as it is supposed to be for some unreal neutral mood, midway between both and of value to neither, and living its brief minute simply through the indolence of whoever accepts it or his incapacity to denounce it as a cheat.

“An absolute vision is not for this world, but we are permitted a continual approximation to it, every degree of which in the individual, provided it exceed the attainment of the masses, must procure him a clear advantage. Did the poet ever attain to a higher platform than where he rested and exhibited the result? Did he know more than he spoke of?

“With respect to Shelley, as well as some other few illustrious examples, the unmistakable quality of the verse would be evidence enough, under usual circumstances, not only of the kind and degree of the intellectual but of the moral constitution. . . . In conjunction with noble and rare powers came the subordinate power of delivering these attained results to the world in an embodiment of verse more closely answering to, and indicative of, the process of the informing spirit—with a diction more adequate to the task in its natural and acquired richness, its material colour, and spiritual transparency—the whole being moved by, and suffused with, a music at once of the soul and the sense, expressive both of an external might of sincere passion and an internal fitness and consonancy than can be attributed to any other writer among us. Such was the spherical poetical faculty of Shelley, as its own self-sacrificing central light, radiating equally through immaturity and accomplishment, through many fragments and occasional completion, reveals it to a competent judgment.

“But the acceptance of this book by the public has been retarded by certain objections which cast us back on the evidence of biography, even with Shelley’s poetry in our hand. The misapprehension of his age is exactly what a poet is sent to remedy; and the interval between his operation and the general perceptible effect of it is no greater, less indeed, than in many other departments of great human effort.

“The experience of Shelley was peculiarly unfortunate that the disbelief in him as a man even preceded disbelief in him as a writer; the misconstruction of his moral nature preparing the way for the misconstruction of his intellectual labour. The doubts, therefore, arising from such a question required to be set at rest, as they were effectually by those

early authentic notices of Shelley's career, and the corroborative accompaniment of his letters, in which not only the main purity of his life, but the purity and beauty of many of the processes which had conduced to them, were made apparent enough for the general reader's purpose—whoever lightly condemned Shelley first on the evidence of reviews and gossip, as lightly acquitting him now, on that of memoirs and correspondence—a biography composed in harmony with the present general disposition to have faith in him, yet not shrinking from a candid statement of all ambiguous passages through a reasonable confidence—in the perfection of his character according to the poor limits of our humanity.

“Nor will men persist in confounding, any more than God confounds, with genuine infidelity those passionate impatient struggles of a boy towards distant love and truth—crude convictions of boyhood conveyed in imperfect and inapt forms of speech—for such things all boys have been pardoned.

“A Divine Being has Himself said that a word against the Son of Man shall be forgiven, while a word against the Spirit of God (implying a general deliberate preference of perceived evil to perceived good) shall not be forgiven to a man.

“I shall say what I think—had Shelley lived, he would have finally ranged himself with the Christians: his very instinct for helping the weaker side, his very hate of hate which at first mistranslated itself into delirious ‘Queen Mab’ notes and the like, would have got clear-sighted by exercise. The preliminary step to following Christ is the leaving the dead to bury their dead: already he had attained to a profession of ‘a worship of the Spirit within.’

“In Shelley the world has a Titan of genius, murmuring in divine music his human ignorance through his very thirst for knowledge—the tragic cutting short of life perpetuated into sins, such faults as, under happier circumstances, would have been left behind.

“Shelley's noblest and predominant characteristic is as subjective artist: His simultaneous perception of Power and Love in the absolute, and of Beauty and Good in the concrete, while he throws from his poet's station between both, swifter, subtler, and more numerous films, for the connection of each with each, than have been thrown by any modern artificer of whom I have knowledge: proving how, as he says:

“‘The spirit of the worm within the sod,
In love and worship blend with God.’”

“It is because I have long held these opinions in assurance and gratification that I catch at the opportunity offered to

me of expressing them here. It was the dream of my boyhood to render signal service to his fame and memory."

This text of Browning's Essay on Shelley may be found in the Cambridge Edition of Browning; the exact text as given here is from a copy of that edition issued by the Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass. (Mifflin and Co.).

CHAPTER III

"*MEN AND WOMEN*"

Poems written in Italy—Dedicated to Mrs. Browning—
Expression of purposes of Art, Music, Love, Aspiration—
Christian Mysticism—Christian Apologetics—Israelitish
method of combating mental trouble—Faculty of
imagination—Mesmerism—Ideal of complete man as
knowledge seeker—Transcendentalism—Adventure of the
intuitionist—Human isolation of spirit—Intoxication of
spiritual ideas—Last word to E. B. B.—Gratitude for
human love, thankfulness for human companionship—
Personal confession by the fireside.

IN 1855 a collection of poems with the title "*Men and Women*" was published.

Volumes I. and II. comprise the work of Browning from 1855 to the death of his wife, and end with his tribute to her and what she had meant to him. In a letter to her he had referred to his habit, after seeing her, of sitting down to add the "one word more" to carry on the subject of interest that had been occupying their minds: so the volumes of "*Men and Women*" went out to the world seven years before her death with the old "*One Word More: To E. B. B.*"

These poems and the Essay on Shelley represent his mind and soul interest for the five years after "*Christmas Eve and Easter Day*" was published, and are mainly of Italian atmosphere.

Volume I. of "*Men and Women*" contained: "*A Lovers' Quarrel*"; "*Love Among the Ruins*"; "*Evelyn Hope*"; "*Up at a Villa—Down in the City*"; "*A Woman's Last Word*"; "*Fra Lippo Lippi*"; "*A Toccata of Galuppi's*"; "*By the Fireside*"; "*Any Wife to*

Any Husband"; "An Epistle containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish the Arab Physician"; "Mesmerism"; "A Serenade at the Villa"; "My Star"; "Instans Tyrannus"; "A Pretty Woman"; "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"; "Respectability"; "A Light Woman"; "The Statue and the Bust"; "Love in a Life"; "Life in a Love"; "How it Strikes a Contemporary"; "The Last Ride Together"; "The Patriot: An Old Story"; "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha"; "Bishop Blougram's Apology"; "Memorabilia."

Volume II. contained: "Andrea del Sarto (called the Faultless Painter)"; "Before"; "After"; "In Three Days"; "In a Year"; "Old Pictures in Florence"; "In a Balcony"; "Saul" (of which the first part had been published in No. 7 of "Bells and Pomegranates," 1846; in that the poem ended at Section 9, in 1855 was added the Sections 10 to 19); "De Gustibus"; "Women and Roses"; "Protus"; "Holy Cross Day"; "The Guardian Angel: A Picture at Fano"; "Cleon"; "The Twins"; "Popularity"; "The Heretic's Tragedy: A Middle-Age Interlude"; "Two in the Campagna"; "A Grammarian's Funeral"; "One Way of Love"; "Transcendentalism"; "Misconceptions"; "One Word More: To E. B. B."

The biographies by Vasari supply the groundwork of the art poems, and although, as Miss Barrett reminded him, Vasari is not the textbook of the world, these poems are so deeply instructive that they (as there are so many art lovers in the world) appealed direct and beyond the lives of the people specified. In these poems collateral terms do not embarrass; it matters not who the "Hulking Tom" of "Fra Lippo Lippi" may have been: the art emotion goes direct to the general art soul, from the merry soul in the cowl of frolicsome Lippi, and speaks its message for the natural life in art, that Browning made so many of his poems an apologia and plea for.

“ Art was given for that ;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out.”

Fra Lippo Lippi.

Art paints everything, says frolicsome Lippo Lippi :
you’ve seen the world.

“ This world’s no blot for us,
Nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good :
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.”

Art’s message is wonder, says Lippo Lippi, too :

“ The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all !
—For what ? Do you feel thankful, ay or no ?
 . . . What’s it all about ?
To be passed over, despised ? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at ? oh, this last of course !—you say.
But why not do as well as say,—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it ?
God’s works—paint anyone, and count it crime
To let a truth slip.”

Art’s business, says “ Fra Lippo Lippi,” is to fumble
amid the parts of truth in life in order to reconstruct the
whole in rage for truth’s completed whole :

“ Art which I may style the love of loving, rage
Of knowing, seeing, feeling the absolute truth of things
For truth’s sake, whole and sole, not any good truth
 brings
The knower, seer, feeler.”

In the poem “ Old Pictures in Florence ” Browning
takes Giotto to task for not guiding him to his portrait,
from which point he discusses the Old Masters and their
art, and flashes some just indignation at their treatment
by posterity :

“ A lion who dies of an ass’s kick,
The wronged great soul of an Ancient ‘ Master.’ ”

"My Kirkcup" refers to the Florentine acquaintance who discovered Giotto's portrait of Dante in the Bargelli: why not have guided him to the find? the poet complains—he, who loves the spirit of Dante, ought to have been a readier medium than Kirkcup.

To present even unlovely truth in his characters and situations was the object of Browning's art:

"When a soul has seen
By the means of Evil that Good is best,
And, through earth and its noise, what is heaven's
serene,—
When our faith in the same has stood the test—
Why, the child-grown man, you burn the rod,
The uses of labour are surely done."

Old Pictures in Florence.

To the argument of the perfection of Greek art he replies that it is Art's work now beyond Beauty of the visible form:

"To become now self-acquainters,
And paint man man, whatever the issue!
Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
New fears aggrandise the rags and tatters:
To bring the invisible full into play!
Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters?"

Old Pictures in Florence.

"A Toccata of Galuppi's" is a present-day soliloquy on an old Italian, Baldasare Galuppi, of date 1706-1785. He was a composer of fame and most industrious of men; he left seventy operas. He lived and worked in London from 1741 to 1744, then went to Russia; from there to Venice, becoming the organist of St. Mark's Charitable Bequest to the Poor till his death. He also wrote comic operas.

"A Toccata" is the overture to a larger work. It touches the theme superficially, lightly, suggesting deeper chords: in its early form the "Toccata" was of the nature of an improvisation.

Browning was given to improvising himself. He had

a fine musical gift, wrote Mrs. Bridell-Fox, and would sit down and improvise at any time. He describes this habit of seeking inspiration in music in the poem of “ Ffine-at-the-Fair.”

“ A Toccata of Galuppi’s ” is a poem representing a reverie—what that great composer’s supposed reflections would be a century later. These musings question the past of Venice. Where are the people who listened? What the fate of those whose day seemed so empty? Did they deserve extinction, those distinguished men and those dear dead women with their hair of gold? Yet the muser questions of their lives :

“ What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?”

The poem glances at the life of the old-time Venetians—frivolous, gay, living the life of love-making. What did it all amount to? They had to die, they were told, but danced on unheeding. But—

“ Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,—
On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on
its bed,
O’er the breast’s superb abundance where a man might lay
his head?”

What did this voluptuousness come to? says the speaker in the poem. What did they really care for your music amid their kissing and coquetry, their scant attention to the Old Master?

“ Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as
well undone,
Death came tacitly and took them where they never see
the sun.

“ Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what
Venice earned!
The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be
discerned.

“ Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly
were the crop.

What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to
stop ? ”

The poem touches lightly on the lives of the knowledge-seekers of Venice—the scientific men immersed in seeking to know the truth ; despising the butterfly life of men of fashion. None the less, what was left of soul for them when intellectual energy and its pleasures had to stop—the research of physics, the diggings of geology, the allurements of mathematics, the speculation of evolution—these feel sure of themselves :

“ Souls shall rise in their degree ;
Butterflies may dread extinction,—you’ll not die, it cannot be ! ”

The poem “ Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha ” is an imaginary interview between an organist, who has just played the congregation out of a church, and the old dead composer. The organist calls upon Master Hugues to tell him what he means by certain movements in his compositions that puzzle him to interpret. What did he mean by those fugues, mountainous in structure, idea piled upon idea, ending in the clouds ? And he must tell it concisely, because the church is emptying, and he has but little candle left to light himself down from the loft with.

And what the meaning of a fugue seems to him to be, when all is told, is a disputation like that of a group of angry politicians, all wanting to speak at once, with unfinished sentences lost in the wrangle of sound.

Here the organist points the moral of the fugue of Master Hugues—all conflicting movements, glimpses of truth, nature buried with truth under shams and subterfuges and evasions, which obliterate truth as the melody of the fugue is buried under the tricks of musical puzzling of the fugue’s mountain of sound. The organist will forget

the fugue and play something better—his full organ blare of pure truthful music of the Church. He will turn on the *mode Palestrina*: as the mystic Pascal was better than the casuist Escobar, so was Palestrina to Master Hugues.

Master Hugues was a composer existing only in the imagination of the poet. This fugue in poetry, like its musical composition the fugue, flies from point to point of soul, while the original past is continuous below them.

“The Heretic’s Tragedy” relates the legend of the burning of a heretic, Jacques du Bourg-Molay, at Paris in 1314.

The story had passed through the centuries as gossip from mouth to mouth. The speakers of the poem are the Abbot Deodaet and his monks telling the story of two centuries ago—the legend of the burning of the heretic who had betrayed his Order and sold his faith to the Mohammedan, and was burned by order of the Pope, who suppressed the Order in 1312.

The Knights Templars were originally an Order pledged to defend the holy places and pilgrims journeying there from the Saracens. They were accused of being unfaithful to their trust and being in league with the Saracens, and were suppressed. Their Grand Master, who was a Frenchman, was burned in Paris, protesting his innocence of the charge; but hideous charges of blasphemy and outrage to the crucifix and the worshipping of idols were made against them—they admitted, though under torture, the spitting on the Cross.

Carlyle, in his “Critical and Miscellaneous Essays,” writes of these Templars and their rites of initiation that their purpose was to undermine the institution of the Catholic Church in order to serve the cause of true religion by redeeming its spirit from the state of thralldom the Church had brought it to in 1314. The Templars were a secret society with advanced views on religion and politics,

advanced only to the initiated of their Order ; they thwarted the injustices of the King, gained the love of the poor, became very wealthy—both of which excited the hatred of the King of France to them, hence the order for their suppression and the burning of them as heretics.

The poem pictures graphically and luridly the burning of Jacques, the head of the Order ; the pitilessness of the executors of the decree ; their gloatings over his sufferings. Report said that the victim called upon the Saviour, whom he was charged with having forsaken, and sold to the Infidel. As he called, " Saviour, save thou me !" the Face in the Cross is revealed through the flames ; he sees his Judge as his soul flares into the dark.

The Abbot concludes the recital with the words :

" God help all poor souls lost in the dark !"

The poem " Andrea del Sarto " was suggested by the picture of Andrea and Lucrezia in the Pitti Palace ; its kindly purpose of sending Mr. Kenyon a description of it, developed into the poem of " Andrea del Sarto (called the Faultless Painter)." The picture exhibits Andrea pleading with Lucrezia, his hand on her shoulder ; he looks into her face, but hers is turned coldly away : hers is the cold and masterful will, his the ardent and submissive. Lucrezia is all to him, he nothing to her ; as he pleads she is waiting for the call of another, says Browning's poem, as addition to the emotion of the picture—for Lucrezia's character was acknowledged as faithless as untender.

The poem makes the picture speak, and analyses the defects of Andrea, who, although faultless in technique, is defective in soul. He feels his lack and recognises his spiritual failure, though the perfect lines and craftsman's skill give him the title of the Faultless Painter. He wonders what is the secret of Raffaello and Agnolo : his drawing is even better than theirs, yet he sees their creative supremacy over him. Why is this? Can two

great gifts not meet in one artist—must Art's gift be shares? But he had the true passion and fire once, he believes, before he fell into his coil of trouble of spending the King's money dishonestly. Still Lucrezia is his gain, though Art's loss; she is his incentive to work in order to make money. But he is only that to her. As they talk she is impatient to get away to the cousin waiting for her; Andrea would like her to stay and smile at him, he might so paint the picture he longs to do—the Virgin of his dreams, but not his wife this time. He is hopeless of rivalling the great ones now—will he reach it hereafter? Now he knows only that he has Lucrezia—that bondage he cannot break.

The last word of the poem is the limitation of the artist. Perfection alone is not Art's greatest note: it is Art's business to suggest—its incompleteness itself suggests the completion; a great artist's life, like his art, must remain unfulfilled—artist and Art must suggest something beyond—truth beyond technical truth; wonder beyond the perfection of colour; the divinity of love beyond the earthly prototype in woman's beauty; moral beauty beyond the body's beauty; spirit beyond the soul's beauty.

The poem “Cleon” is the utterance of a Greek intellectual. In the spirit of intellectual curiosity the poem examines the uprise of Christian faith, and speculates upon the faith and fame of the Apostles from the point of view of one who sees the hold of an old Order relaxing, and has no faith in the flood of hope in Christianity, as preached by the simple love doctrines of this sect of Judea.

Cleon has achieved all that intellect can do—written books, studied the soul, knows all about the human strivings towards progress; sees in it, after all, only failure at its highest without God and without hope. All that intellect gives dies as mental powers fail: can it be that the secret of life that eludes Cleon is possessed by a “mere barbarian Jew, Paulus”?

Life, says Cleon, perfects itself in physical and visible

forms : is it possible that further perfection depends upon another step in completion after the mechanics of physical being can go no further? After limpet, fish, snake, bird in progress, is there a further thing, wonderful as physical and mental completion is—completion in consciousness of soul?

“ (If I might add a glory to the scheme).”

Cleon is half persuaded of the new doctrine of soul. By the evidence of his reason, he sees that, till completion of its being is reached, nothing in life is at rest ; and yet, with all its known completions, man’s “ life’s inadequate to joy,” the completion of the soul in art, in intellectual achievement, in posthumous fame. And yet, says Cleon, as he reviews the process of age and decay, of loss of faculty, of power to work, but still alive to enjoyment ; knowing most, enjoying most, with past powers and mockery before death :

“ The horror quickening still from year to year,
The consummation coming past escape—
Alive still, in the phrase of such as thou.”

Is immortality such as intellect claims (to “ live on lips of living men,” says Butler) ; is that to be alone the end of man’s achievements? also says the intellectual Cleon : Alive by posthumous fame only, says Cleon :

“ I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
The man who loved his life so over-much,
Shall sleep in my urn.”

Cleon cannot rest in the thought of this complete extinction by death ; that all man’s unlimited capabilities should end so seems impossible. He sees man’s joy, all man’s capacities, apparently made

“ On purpose to make sweet the life at large—
Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,
We burst there as the worm into the fly.”

Cleon knows the analogy of the worm and the fly, the chrysalis that Greeks recognised as emblem of immortality, the mystery of the winged butterfly rising from the creeping worm, the symbol on which he dares raise the faith that—

“ We burst there as the worm into the fly,
Who, while a worm still, wants his wings.”

“ But no !” says the Greek intellectual ; surely such a revelation would have come to the Greek mind if to anyone :

“ Zeus has not yet revealed it.”

Yet he has an uneasy feeling which he confides to his correspondent :

“ Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcised,
Hath access to a secret shut from us ?”

Karshish the Arab Physician, an ardent Scientist, also examines an incident in the dawn of Christianity. He is a wandering scholar, anxious to serve knowledge ; he writes the incidents of his discoveries to his master “ Abib,” as a good student should. He mentions rare herbs he has found, samples of which he will send ; but the matter which has aroused his greatest curiosity is pathological—it is the apparent mania of “ one Lazarus, a Jew,” who, in answer to some exorcisation of a Nazarene physician, came back to life from seeming death, and he opines it would be a great thing for the medical art if it could find the drug which procured such a result. He has had Lazarus under observation—he seems like a newborn being ; he puts all his old joys in the dust, and he writes with indignation that this man regards the Nazarene as—

“ The very God ! think, Abib ; dost thou think ?
So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice

Saying, ' O heart I made, a heart beats here !
 Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself !
 Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
 But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
 And thou must love me who have died for thee !'
 The madman saith He said so : it is strange."

Karshish the physician describes this strange case of mania of Lazarus at length—his indifference to argument, his loss of the sense of proportion of earthly things—and is stupefied because his trivialities engage him : even Rome on the march does not rouse him ; all is love with him, under all argument, he is fixed in his mania :

" The man's own firm conviction rests
 That he was dead . . . and then restored to life
 By a Nazarene physician of his tribe :
 —' Sayeth, the same bade ' Rise,' and he did rise.
 The man's fantastic will is the man's law.
 So here—we call the treasure knowledge, say,
 Increased beyond the fleshly faculty—
 Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
 Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven :

And while his friends tell his case the man but listens,
 says Karshish ; he watches the flies buzz, and yet is no
 fool ; folds his two hands and lets them talk :

" Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach
 The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be,
 Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do :
 How can he give his neighbour the real ground,
 His own conviction ? . . .

" Look, if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,
 Should find a treasure,—can he use the same
 With straitened habits and with tastes starved small,
 And take at once to his impoverished brain
 The sudden element that changes things,
 That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand
 And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust ?
 He holds on firmly to some thread of life—
 (It is the life to lead perforcedly)
 Which runs across some vast distracting orb
 Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
 Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—

The spiritual life around the earthly life:
The law of that is known to him as this
His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.

“And oft the man’s soul springs into his face
As if he saw again and heard again
His sage that bade him ‘Rise’ and he did rise.
Something, a word, a tick o’ the blood within
Admonishes: then back he sinks at once
To ashes, who was very fire before,
In sedulous recurrence to his trade
Whereby he earneth him the daily bread;
And studiously the humbler for that pride,
Professedly the faultier that he knows
God’s secret, while he holds the thread of life.
Indeed the especial marking of the man
Is prone submission to the heavenly will.

. . . Ardent as he is—

Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old
‘Be it as God please’ reassureth him.
Contrariwise, he loves both old and young,
Able and weak, affects the very brutes
And birds—how say I? flowers of the field—
As a wise workman recognises tools
In a master’s workshop, loving what they make.
Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb:
Only impatient, let him do his best,
At ignorance and carelessness and sin—
An indignation which is promptly curbed:
As when in certain travel I have feigned
To be an ignoramus in our art
According to some preconceived design,
And happed to hear the land’s practitioners
Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,
Prattle fantastically on disease,
Its cause and cure—and I must hold my peace!

“This man so cured regards the curer, then,
As—God forgive me! who but God himself,
Creator and sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
—‘Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat.”

So Karshish, wandering in a distant land in pursuit of
medical knowledge, hears the story of Christ and His

miracles. Writing to his master on his scientific discoveries, he just mentions this incidentally as a curiosity. But it haunts him. He can't get rid of it. He thinks this man a bit crazed. He goes on with his tale of scientific explorations, and again at the letter's close the singular story takes him again, and he repeats :

" Think, Abib; dost thou think?

So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too.
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee."

"My Star" is a small poem confessing to a different point of view the writer has from others concerning a certain star. His star dartles colours for him, but apparently for him alone :

" Till my friends have said

They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled:
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me: therefore I love it."
(Rev. xxii. 16.)

"My Star" was the only poem of his own he could remember, Browning used to say, and he invariably wrote it in the album Society presented to him in later life for a contribution and autograph, reports Mrs. Arthur Bronson.

The poem "Instans Tyrannus"—the threatening tyrant—was suggested by Horace's "Ode on the Just Man."

This man, says the poem, is unshaken in his resolve, despite the demands of the mob or frowns of tyrants; but the tyrant himself knows the futility of mere force in compelling others to his will, and sees, although not acknowledging it, the Divine arm that can stretch out from the heavens to protect the victims of tyranny and avenge them. The poem depicts a poor ill-favoured, apparently contemptible, specimen of mankind under a

tyrant who would destroy him like a rat in a hole; but suddenly something happened—the tyrant saw God's arm in the sky—the friendless wretch unfolded as he called for help:

"caught at God's skirts, and prayed!
—So, I was afraid!" confesses the tyrant.

"Transcendentalism" is a poem in which the speaker bids the poet cease singing and let the transcendentalist have his say outright—admonish the poet and show his error although it is art: it is always the poet way to drape thoughts instead of giving them in their naked truth and goodness as thoughts that might be treasured up, and

"Stark-naked thought is in request enough:
Speak prose and holloa it till Europe hears!"

The poet says that what grown men mean by verse, and see in verse, is thought.

"Boys seek for images and melody."

To make nature speak and force itself upon you—that's art:

"As Swedish Bøhme never cared for plants
Until it happed, a-walking in the fields,
He noticed all at once that plants could speak."

Time needs this seeing man to suit its needs; after Jacob came John of Halberstadt:

"Who made things Bøhme wrote about.
He with a 'look you!' vents a brace of rhymes,
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
And over everything, Bøhme's books and all,
Buries us with a glory, young once more
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life."

"Popularity" is a poem addressed to a poet obscure and struggling—one that Browning saw from afar and knew, and named him a star. The fact is that this poet he sees afar, puts "blue" in his line which is then un-

known and not to the public taste—an element of blue, which such a pioneer fished up from the sea, extracted from its shell, and reduced to something portable; an extract fit for uses of the common life. Merchants to come will buy and sell it, this blue; they will grow wealthy on it, eat turtle and drink claret with their riches derived from it. But the man who discovered it shares the lot of the discoverer; he starves while Hobbs, Nobbs, and Stokes gorge by the sale of blue in their line, that this obscure man fished up and starved while extracting it for posterity's use. Remember the fate of the poet, he says: "What porridge had John Keats?" And what had Francis Thompson? may be asked now.

Blue is Browning's constant symbol for imagination. This blue is exploited by Hobbs, Nobbs, and Stokes now, exploited for material ends to bring material rewards. Christ in the blue is materialised, concerned with the body, its health, its success, the business it is engaged in, the wealth it can acquire by drawing down Christ to its uses for earthly comfort and aggrandisement.

Keats was long since dead when "Popularity" was written. The subject of the poem is addressed first in the present tense, then the future tense of prophecy, and asked in his distress to remember—

"That loving hand of His that leads you
Yet locks you safe from end to end
Of this dark world, unless He needs
Just saves your light to spend."

Seeds from the Divine Hand are to be loosed for such:

"His clenched Hand shall uncloze at last,
I know, and let out all the beauty:
My poet holds the future fast.

"Meantime, I'll draw you as you stand,
With few or none to watch and wonder:
I'll say—a fisher (on the sand
By Tyre the Old) his ocean plunder,
A netful brought to land.

“Yet there’s the dye, in that rough mesh,”

which dye was to furnish such hangings for the temple, leading to the act when, in the blue, the strange union is consummated—the Divine pursuit ended :

“What time, with ardours manifold,
The bee goes singing to her groom,
Drunken and overbold.”

The poem “How it Strikes a Contemporary” is the presentment, ironical and contemptuous, of the light in which contemporary criticism regards a poet—the only poet I ever knew in my life, says the opening line—and is followed by a picture full of felicities of descriptive lines upon the poet’s appearance : his serviceable suit—courtly once, conscientious now ; his tapping cane ; his scrutinising hat ; his entranced interest in the life of the streets ; his glance at the bookstalls ; his humanity :

“He took such cognisance of men and things,
If any beat a horse, you felt he saw ;
If any cursed a woman, he took note.”

Contemporary chatter says he is in the King’s pay, and writes him a letter every night. The gossips were a bit afraid of a look he could give :

“As back into your mind the man’s look came.
Stricken in years a little,—such a brow
His eyes had to live under!—clear as flint
On either side the formidable nose
Curved, cut and coloured, like an eagle’s claw.”

But whatever gossip said, there was one thing he would vouch for—he tracked up that scandal and found out the truth : the poet was not the sensualist they pictured him :

“Poor man, he lived another kind of life !
In that new stuccoed, third house by the bridge,
The whole street might o’erlook him as he sat
Playing a decent cribbage with his maid.”

The poem “The Patriot” tells the old story of ingratitude, the turn of the wheel, the tragedy of other

times—other manners. One year all was roses, roses, the myrtle wreath, the crowds, the illuminations, the flying of flags, the bell-ringing, the proffered rewards of the sun itself for the victor, and how revulsion came from the Patriot's country—his was the idealist's disillusion, this failure of his fellows to follow his leaps to the sun and the harvest of pain from it all after the occasion for his help is over.

It is an old story, ever new : the idealist's dream disowned ; the silence of the crowd now—perhaps death's silence in wait for the Patriot. It is a sorry picture—the rain that cuts, the rope that galls, the bleeding forehead from stones flying : thus are two pictures, the entry and departure, this disapprobation upon that former approbation, such the pay of the world :

“ God might have questions : but now instead
 ’Tis God shall requite ! I am safer so.”

“ The Statue and the Bust ” is the story of the mortal jealousy that is the theme of so much Italian tragedy, and the coquetry of its women, as this bride of the Riccardi who, in looking at her bridegroom even, casts the glance along to another. The bridegroom read this glance past himself : with unscrupulous power he condemned his bride henceforward to one room in the palace ; she could watch—she would never mingle with the world again.

She dreams of flying to the Duke whose glance she thought meant love. The Duke dreams of rescuing her as he rides by every day and sees her watching for him from her prison. Both dream—life passes—the lady grows grey, the Prince sighs as youth passes—the lady was traitor to her husband's love, the Duke was traitor to life and love : it is the crowning sin to life to miss the chance of love. But if through a crime ? says the poem. A crime will do as well as virtue to test the soul, answers the poet—the sin of life is to rust in disuse, to stagnate in deceit, to rot and decay in dreams. That Browning did not advise

lawless love, he shows in the first episode of “Pippa Passes.”

The statue of Ferdinand veritably “watches” the window of the palace in Florence that Browning’s lovers never fail to look for there, but in the window is only the “bust” fixed there by his imagination—the woman pilloried, ever fascinated by the rider “with the royal air” whose statue veritably stands in the square below the “palace in Florence, the world knows well.”

As Keats pictured the ever-living power of art, to embody beauty, in the “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” Browning used his genius to transfix and immortalise a story unbeautiful, unheroic, ignoble—the woman at the window, ever waiting for the lover in the square—as a type of stultification of life; of indolence too futile to achieve; of aspiration too clogged by fear to attempt; of cunning that cloaks crime; of deception that rusts the purposes of love, that darkens the lamp of spirit; that, in futile waiting, mute inoperation, lives—a guilty lie to God as to man:

“Where is the use of the lip’s red charm,
The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
And the blood that blues the inside arm—

“Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
The earthly gift to an end divine?
A lady of clay is as good, I trow.”

So Ferdinand, contemptuous of the call of his lady’s beauty, ever rode by; the lady, contemptuous of the call of her duty, keeps her fixed outlook on her ideal but fruitless hope:

“Some one who ever passes by.”

To such as reproach the poem for its suggestion of dishonour to the name of love, the speaker replies:

“And it shall go hard but I contrive
To listen meanwhile, and laugh in my tomb
At indolence which aspires to strive.”

How do these spirits pass their time now, he wonders.

"Nights and days in the narrow room?

"Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
What a gift life was, ages ago,
Six steps out of the chapel yonder,"

amid these they lie :

"The soldier-saints who, row on row,
Burn upward each to his point of bliss."

That the end of such a situation as that pictured in the first story of "Pippa Passes" is true end; that love should turn to loathing in the man, and death be the end of the woman, is not the solution of such a situation, for choice of means to end it: the lurid ending of an Ottima and a Sebald, Browning's art does not commend, but to rust in a lie, to corrode in deception, is equally death-dealing to the soul, whether the stakes be true or sham :

"The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin:
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

"Was the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a crime."

By action, says Browning in "The Statue and the Bust," the soul can alone live; to rust in inaction is the prime sin against Nature. The secret of life is action: cease to act, ever rust in a lie, as this woman ever at her window watching, the man ever fixed in his irresolution passing on, leaving her with her back to her duties, her face from the light of her obligations, rusting in a disuse that clogged the machinery of life around her, frustrated life in its prime purpose of creation, the delivery of the soul.

The poem "The Last Ride Together" is an Idealist's attempted justification of his work to his mistress. She has grown tired of his efforts to please her—she has dismissed him. He asks for one more ride with her to plead his cause; he thought she would not grant it—"life or death in the balance."

As they rode, his imagination pictured her drawn from her heaven to his earth :

" Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear !
Thus lay she a moment on my breast."

The scroll of his soul unfurled as they rode, past hopes were left behind, useless strivings forgotten in the life awry : had he done this, had he done that, she might have loved, she might have hated—who can tell?

" Am I alone a failure in the world of words and deeds?" he pleads :

" Why, all men strive and who succeeds?"

All know

" The petty Done, the Undone vast."

" What hand and brain went ever paired?" he argues,

" What heart alike conceived and dared?

What act proved all its thought had been?

What will but felt the fleshly screen?"

Why strive for earth's honours? he pleads—the statesman's power, the soldier's glory :

" They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.

My riding is better, by their leave."

The poet tells the meaning of his life ; he says his brain beats into rhythm the idealist's emotion :

" What we felt only ; you expressed

You hold things beautiful the best,

And pace them in rhyme so, side by side."

Does this success bring happiness? he asks. Is the poet one whit nearer his own sublime? For him, riding's the joy—such life is best :

" Had fate

Proposed bliss here should sublimate

My being—had I signed the bond—

Still one must lead some life beyond."

His plea is listened to in silence : perhaps this moment sublimates to a hint of an eternity of bliss, that heaven will be :

“ We, fixed so, ever should abide ;
 What if we still ride on, we two,
 With life for ever old yet new,
 Changed not in kind but in degree,
 The instant made eternity,—
 And heaven just prove that I and she
 Ride, ride together, for ever ride?”

“ In a Balcony ” is an incompleted drama. A crisis in three lives is compressed into one hour and there left—the three-cornered tragedy of two women in love with the same man ; one woman old, never having truly loved, the other's love requited, the young lovers acting a part that the elder woman, who is a Queen, may not suspect. The Queen is married, but would dissolve her marriage for this true love that she feels. She discusses her resolve with the younger woman, who prepares to sacrifice her love in the man's interests. She declares her intention while avowing her love to the man. The jealous Queen, secretly listening, says nothing ; her vengeance is silently arranged ; she leaves the balcony from which she has heard the words of the lovers. A ball was in progress—the music ceases with ominous suddenness, the tramp of guards is heard, the lovers divine their doom. One passion of love's caress unites them for a moment—they pass out to their death.

“ Before ” and “ After ” are poems of emotion before a duel and after it : a duel between Browning and Forster seemed imminent during their quarrel, but was averted. This is recorded in Macready's journal.

In the letters of Browning to Miss Barrett the subject of duelling is a controversial one between them. Browning is for the necessity of avenging a wrong so : Miss Barrett cannot approve it, but wrong must be avenged ; the blow for the right must be struck ; but the pity of it

is, says the conclusion of the poem, although he has been deeply wronged, or challenged death for the right, the victim of the wrong remembers who said, “Vengeance is mine,” and in performing the act of just retaliation, the human avenger suffers the pang of a memory of perfection :

“ I would we were boys as of old,
In the field, by the fold :
His outrage, God’s patience, man’s scorn
Were so easily borne !”

“The Twins” is a poem upon the certain result of Christ’s promise : “Give” and “It-shall-be-given-unto-you.” It was written to help a charitable cause.

The opening is a round word of praise for Martin Luther with his fables like “flowers on furze.” One of these fables of Luther is of a beggar who asked for alms at the Abbey door—asked the Abbot to relieve him, but who pleaded, “We’re poor.” Then the beggar tells the story of Date and Dabatur, the twins—“Give” and “It-shall-be-given-unto-you.”

When Date was active, Dabatur flourished ; when one suffered, the other suffered : reciprocity was perfect between Date and Dabatur. With this rebuke to his want of charity and faith—

“The Abbot hung his head.”

Luther pointed the rebuke by recalling the legends of the Church as to angelic visitants in disguise :

“This beggar might be perhaps
An angel, Luther said.”

“Any Wife to Any Husband” is an utterance upon the inevitable mutability of life. When the wife has to die, she muses, what must come to the man whose nature is to move on and forget?—how the woman would be steadfast and full of memories of the love gone. The inevitable

fact of the difference has to be faced : the woman thinks with pain of the inevitable exchange to come with another of the love story nearly over between them. She pictures how he will—

“ Re-issue looks and words from the old mint,
Pass them afresh, no matter whose the print
Image and superscription once they bore!”

Yet time would not efface her gold :

“ Faithful or faithless, sealing up the sum
Or lavish of my treasure, thou must come
Back to the heart’s place here I keep for thee!”

Yet the strain of his forgetful lapses to come troubles her dying hours : these other women with their chat of her—of her love, that was all the treasure she had, while he with his wide interests had to give so little. Could she believe he was equal to remembering—through pride even—when she needed his remembrance most :

“ And I wake saved—and yet, it will not last.”

“ Two in the Campagna ” is the monologue of a man out on the Campagna with the woman he loves. The Campagna is an area around Rome ; it has a place in another poem of Browning’s of this series—“ Love Among the Ruins.”

The Campagna fascinated the minds of the artist group in Rome. Leighton—one of Browning’s intimate friends of his Continental period of life—described it in a letter to Mrs. Sutherland Orr, his sister, and first biographer of Browning.

The Campagna was anciently the seat of numerous cities, whose ruins are part of the fascination of the Campagna.

The poem is another of those presentments of an incompleteness that is the essence and necessity of human life. The speaker says of their love that he would it could be final and fixed, but nothing is final in life. Pleasure

looks beyond pleasure, learning ever descends new heights to be attained, wealth ever seeks to add to wealth; and love, the holiest and best passion of the soul, too, must ever look beyond its finite love to the Infinite Love beyond: even in his love he discerns something lacking:

“Only I discern—
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.”

“Love Among the Ruins” is a poem of a love idyll among the ruins of Rome. The lovers are out on the Campagna; the wonder of it is over them, with joy that turns to pain in its intensity of regret for the great past the ruins indicate—a vast past dwindled to a hearsay—the great half-buried marble, the uprising shaft of a column overrun with vegetation, the eternal beauty of nature concealing the decaying products of human beings long since vanished.

The speaker ruminates upon the wreck, but a golden-haired girl is beside him, and all the past centuries have led them to this moment, and Love the eternal is recognised.

“A Lovers’ Quarrel” is of the bitter word, of division where before was a world together, of wonder of tongue’s power to send “a shaft from the devil’s bow,” separation and sorrow, but still hope because life is stormy, and love is a haven, and life’s stress will drive them into each other’s arms again.

“In a Year” is the monologue of a woman who has lost a man’s love. How did it happen?—“something said, something done”; some personal failing, some trick of character once pleasing turned to displeasing. How little one knows of the way of love’s coming or going—once all response from both, all love-breathings, some protestations. Was she too responsive? It was right she should show her love being truth: did her love deteriorate to meet his on a lower level?

“ Why should all the giving prove
 His alone?
 I had wealth and ease.
 Since my lover gave me love,
 I gave these.

“ Since he chose to change
 Gold for dust,
 If I gave him what he praised,
 Was it strange?”

Could she find some other way than giving to keep his love? When all was gone, nothing from her to give, would he then want what he now despised? Would he smile and think of her difficulty? Love is so different with men, she sees in disillusion :

“ Can't we touch these bubbles then
 But they break?”

“ Protus ” is a poem calling attention to a small bust of a baby face of genius, with wreath of violets, instead of the laurel crowning the heads of busts of—

“ Half-Emperors and Emperors around.”

The poet will tell the story of this wonderful child—its early triumph, its careful tending, the love of all for it. Then comes a change of reign—the Empire was usurped and the child's life was in danger. Some think he was allowed to slip away unhurt ; others that he was poisoned ; others that he sheltered in a convent and worked there till a great age, first at serving, then at teaching, last as tender of horses and dogs.

It is all cross talk. What really happened to Protus is left to rumour ; he lives as a myth, an abstraction of all the qualities of man—“ A Protus of the race.”

What becomes of the baby prodigies of genius? What usurps the early promise so tended and ministered to?

“ A Pretty Woman ” presents a beautiful woman with simply her beauty to commend her—she has nothing under it.

What then? says the poet. Is it not just enough to be

beautiful? Why want more than refreshment from her charm? The gold and rubies of art shaped to a rose efface Nature. Leave the rose to its garden : why want to gather it, smell it, wear it, then have to throw it away?

So leave the pretty woman in her beauty; the world needs beauty—leave her in her beauty.

"Misconceptions" is a contrasting picture of insensibility and misconception. The spray that the Bird clings to is only of use for further flight to the tree-top better fitted for her nest and treasure.

A Queen leant on a man's heart for a moment; she knew nothing of the ecstasy she brought, the dream that the bosom was worthy of her, only remembering the ecstasy :

"Love to be saved for it, proffered to, spent on!"

"A Serenade at a Villa" is a tale of the serenading of life; the song is the lover's tale of devotion—devotion in secret, as his song is unheard because she is asleep.

But his lady only dreams in her sleep. Life is cynical of lovers' vows. He thinks he hears it in the grind of the gate as he passes out—his music is rude like the gate's grind; after all, she would have had little pleasure if she had been awake.

"Respectability" is a poem of the limitations imposed by Society. We may do what we like, provided Society's limitations are observed. Conformity is the guinea stamp : the world is easily placated if we observe outward respectability; the courtesies of life cover its differences of opinion—in the light of the public eye hatreds and differences must be forgotten : such use Browning himself found in Society.

"Love in a Life" is a poem of the elusiveness of love : its charm is its pursuit, to feel the lingering perfume, to divine the secret presence, the eternal promise of finding, the fruitless quest of searching, and it is getting dusk and

much yet to explore, says the poem; and, after all, it is an allegory :

“ Thus do our ideals evade us.”

“ Life in a Love ” is the hope of a lover that his search will be rewarded, that the woman he pursues will cease to elude him. But he never despairs : as one hope dies another springs to life—and what if he fail here in this? Life could not be better spent than in pursuit of a living ideal.

“ A Woman’s Last Word ” is a poem on the folly of wanting to drive emotion to the last word of speech. Perfect love needs no words—they are wide of it, perhaps hurtful to it ; they may lead to debate, to contention, to strife and weeping. Even truth, if compelled to be uttered, may become false to itself ; definition chills. Reticence, silence, protection, are the language of true love ; to be one in thought—whole in self-sacrifice on the altar of love. It may be a counsel of perfection, and the lesson only learned through sorrow that has to be buried and tears that have to be dried. In its might love can drown both hopes and fears.

“ Women and Roses ” is a poem of a dream of three roses on a tree : one a faded one—it is passed by the bees ; the second, a flower of perfection which the bee revels at ; the third, the rosebud of no use to the bee.

The flowers are three types of womanhood : the woman of the past, of the present, of the future—a dream of woman perennial. The poet must ever trip his measure to its stories.

“ De Gustibus ” is a poem of emotion, the wind of memory, a personal word of Browning confessing the likes and loves embalmed in his memory—where his ghost will walk when free, back to youth and love, and the trees he loves, the cornfields bright with poppies and the coppice with its hazel nuts ; and two young people, boy and girl, making love, fade out of sight here. Let them pass with their love as time passes, and “ May and June ” :

"With the bean-flowers' boon,
And the blackbird's tune."

But love best of all is Italy—there would his spirit return most surely, amid the Apennines, at a seaside house farther South—the romantic region of Italy, with its nature, its beauty, its wealth of life and talk and gossip, there look for me the poet directs :

"Italy, my Italy!
Queen Mary's saying serves for me—
(When fortune's malice
Lost her—Calais)—
Open my heart, and you will see
Graved inside of it 'Italy.'
Such lovers old are I and she:
So it always was, so shall ever be!"

The poem "By the Fireside" is the personal monologue of Browning upon his personal relations, written in the seclusion of his home with his wife. He watches her as she sits by the fireside :

"Musing by firelight—that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it
Yonder, my heart knows how!"

As he muses and watches with the firelight playing over them, his memory retracks the past. He calls up, step by step from the past, the events of his life from youth till this moment—all to be food again for the solitary years to come which he foresees. But meanwhile he will retrack it all while they are together, especially fix in his mind one moment of infinite worth that lay between them—the moment when the last leaf of his old reserve fell :

"Venture the tree and a myriad such,
When nothing you mar but the year can mend:
But a last leaf—fear to touch!

* * * * *

"A moment after, and hands unseen
Were hanging the night around us fast;
But we knew that a bar was broken between
Life and life: we were mixed at last
In spite of the mortal screen."

Emotion had wrung something from that "moment one and infinite," and for what it had done the speaker exults—his soul had declared truth in this crisis that the forest had brought about, and then—

"They relapsed to their ancient mood.

* * * * *

"How the world is made for each of us!
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's product thus,
When a soul declares itself—to wit,
By its fruit—the thing it does!

"Be hate that fruit, or love that fruit,
It forwards the general deed of man,
And each of the Many helps to recruit
The life of the race by a general plan;
Each living his own, to boot."

The poem "By the Fireside" was written at the Bagni di Lucca, says Mrs. Orr, the scene a little adjacent gorge to which Browning often walked or rode.

The poem "The Guardian Angel" is descriptive of a picture by Guercino in the Church of St. Augustine at Ancona, in Italy.

Mr. and Mrs. Browning were staying at Ancona. The poet declares his artistic appreciation of the fine work of Guercino in this picture; and because he did not always paint so well, he is impelled to voice his gratitude for this exquisite picture of limpid faith; he himself longs for just such faith as the little child's in the angel above it, and prayed with the child that he, although a good Protestant, might share the angel's care when it finished with the child. The poem makes reference to the angel beside him on earth, his wife beside him as he wrote, and to the friend over the sea who loves him too; he throws the question to him:

"Alfred (dear friend) . . .

Where are you, dear old friend?
How rolls the Wairoa at your world's far end?"

At this period the early correspondence between Browning and Domett had lapsed; it was for years suspended. Browning had told his friend nothing of his friendship with Miss Barrett and his marriage; his letters ceased—he was remorseful for his secrecy to his friend. He explains his reserve in letters long after the event. This reference in the poem may have been prompted by Browning's sense of his neglect of his old friend at this time of his life; they had been in correspondence of a desultory habit in 1845-46, but news of his marriage, and later of his wife's death, he left for others to tell, shrinking from these deeply personal matters, as he afterwards explained to his friend.

He had written letters, he confessed, which had never been sent; he had tried, he wrote later, “to muster up courage some day which never came: it was too hard to begin and end with all that happened the last thirty years. But come and let us begin again.”

In later life—in 1872—Browning made amends to his friend by his hospitality in London and his interest in his work when Domett severed his connection with New Zealand and settled in London. Through Browning's interest with publishers, the poem “Ranolf and Amohia” was published after much negotiation: it is so far the greatest descriptive poem of New Zealand.

The dedicatory poem, the “One Word More: To E. B. B.,” is the poet's uttered word of love to his wife, the beloved lady of his letters of 1845-46—the “one word more,” a quotation from the letters which revealed the tumultuous rushing into just “one word more” in the letter of the evening, to supplement the spoken word of the afternoon's interview. The poem is appendix to the collection “Men and Women,” which he lays, as offering and firstfruits of their life together in Italy, at her feet.

How to distinguish his tribute to her from his other work? Raphael wrote a century of sonnets to his lady,

Dante proposed to paint a picture of his Beatrice : every artist would signal his supremest human passion by work in another medium than the habitual one. He cannot write a sonnet to her, nor paint her picture ; but he will forsake his big canvas and dramatic medium—he will speak directly and shortly to her to whom his heart is full of gratitude and love for her sheltering love and human care and devoted human soul. He places the work of the first years of their union at her feet, a dedicatory offering of the genius she had discerned where others were blind, to her whom he wrote of, in 1846, as the direct gift of God to him in his lonely way of that time :

“ There they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished !
Take them, Love, the book and me together.
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

“ I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me ;
So it seems : I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me ;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing :
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love !

“ God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her !”

“ Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came ” is a poem of dogged pushing on in face of difficulties and horrors in pursuit of a purpose of discovery ; the adventure of Childe Roland is given for keynote Edgar’s song in “ King Lear.”

In Shakespeare’s time one of the cries at the grated door of Bethlehem, or Bedlam, was from the madmen calling for charity. The madman at his begging grate called for food and warmth, but for public charity he went hungry and cold :

“ Poor naked Bedlam, Tom’s a-cold.”

Shakespeare put the cry “Tom’s a-cold” into the song of Edgar in “King Lear”—the phrase that Edgar knew would convey impression of his madness. Browning expects his readers to know the meaning of the street cries of Shakespeare’s day.

At first the speaker in the poem believes that the reply he gets to his questioning for direction on his shadowy quest is true, that all is discomfiture and distress, starved nature, starved life, starved soul; but he throws back the cry of madness and pushes on in spite of warnings of memories of lost adventurers his peers, defying the tolling bells or the knell of the lost who look on :

“To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! In a sheet of flame
I saw them and I know them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew. ‘*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower
Came.*’ ”

The poem opens with a line throwing back the lie to the hoary-headed cripple who would daunt the traveller in his quest—throwing him back the cry of madness. He determined to push on, and the poem recounts horror after horror of desolation that rise to meet him. Even memory adds its picture of failures to help to daunt him. But doggedly, determinedly, he passes each hideous landmark by the way. Toiling on, he saw ugly mountains—two hills, looking like two bulls guarding the way. Pushing on—just when he had almost lost his keenness of sight, just when he should have been most wide awake—his quest was attained, but in the hour of its attainment he heard the names tolled of all the lost adventurers his peers: there they ranged to watch yet another victim of the quest the idealist knows.

The poem carries memories of a dogged pushing on over obstacle and difficulty to a mystery in the distance. Browning, when asked by the Rev. Mr. Chadwick if it did not embody constancy to an ideal, if “he that en-

“dureth to the end shall be saved” was not a sufficient interpretation of the central purpose of the poem, said, “Yes, that’s just about it.”

The refrain “Lost! lost!” recalls the lyric of Paracelsus to the shades of the poets calling him to join their airy ring—Shelley, to Browning in his youth, a “Sun-treader”; Keats, whose imagery is in “Pauline,” as the spirit of “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” is in “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came”:

“O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing!

* * * * *

“I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all,
Who cried—‘La Belle Dame sans Merci
Thee hath in thrall!’”

The poem “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” confesses:

“Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among ‘The Band’—to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower’s search addressed
Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now—should I be fit?

* * * * *

“I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart,
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier’s art:
One taste of the old times sets all to rights!”

Despite dangers that bristled in this quest, knives,
halters, poison, sneers, despite the

“Names in my ears,
Of all the lost adventurers my peers. . . .”

* * * * *

“Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew. ‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.’”

Asked by a caller if he accepted Mr. Nettleship's analysis and interpretation of “ Childe Roland,” Browning replied :

“ Oh, no, not at all. Understand, I don't repudiate it, either; I only mean that I was conscious of no allegorical intention in writing it. 'Twas like this: one year in Florence I had been rather lazy; I resolved that I would write something every day. The first day I wrote about some roses, suggested by a magnificent basket that someone had sent my wife. The next day ‘ Childe Roland ’ came upon me as a kind of dream. I had to write it then and there, and I finished it the same day, I believe. But it was simply that I had to do it. I did not know then what I meant beyond that, and I am sure I don't know now. But I am very fond of it.”

The tax which Browning places upon his readers—tax of human knowledge, spiritual knowledge, knowledge of Biblical literature, of history, science, art: assuming all the acquired knowledge of the exceptionally richly gifted intellect—is greatly the cause of difficulty in the minds of his readers.

In the poem of “ Saul ” we are expected to know the surrounding circumstances of the lives of Saul and David. Few readers know, without looking it up, that at the stage Browning writes of, Saul was deposed from his great position of King of Israel by the Lord, and David, the youngest son of Jesse, chosen as his successor by the Lord, who had caused Samuel to pass his sons before him in review for the position, and had selected David, the youngest, despite his insignificant stature among the tall sons of Samuel :

“ And the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.

“ But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from

God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well. And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me. Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Beth-lehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him.

“Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep. And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul. And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight. And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him” (1 Sam. xvi. 14-23).

Saul's trouble was a deep depression and want of mental stamina; his was the vacillating mind and fluctuating purpose; the sense of inability to rely on his own mental strength in that struggle for existence which pressed him with its primitive compulsion of holding his own in warfare against an envious and aggressive world of petty tribal warfare and lust of conquest around him. He had lost his reliance on himself, was conscious of waning powers, of unreliable judgment; he had begun to look for help from the supernatural, and in seeking the sorcery of the Witch of Endor had transgressed the special decree of Jehovah against such practices. His case seemed hopeless as he lay helpless in his tent with hope gone, wrapped in a lassitude that no word could stimulate, his mind alienated, the old energy of the conquering Saul eclipsed, all the powers of the once mighty King Saul in abeyance. The once chosen of the Lord was lying in the depths of dejection and melancholy, sunk in a nervelessness which was dooming him to defeat, unless his mood could be lifted. Saul was sick in mind unto death with diseased imagination unable to lift himself out of the slough of despair, the trough of misery threatening to engulf him.

In this deep mental gloom the ancient resources of Israel were called into practice, and young David the harper was called in to rouse the will and touch the emotional centres to life again by music and rhythm; by memory of past power and action the will to live was to be reinforced.

In the mental disorganisation of Saul, the resources of the suggestions of music and memory, poetry and prophecy, were called into request, as was the custom of the times of the Patriarchs. In modern language Saul would have been diagnosed as suffering from acute neurasthenia. The strain and stress of his life had exhausted him physically and mentally, his life was a perplexity to himself, and music and song were to be used to bring back the unity of mind and soul lost to Saul.

The episode of the young David called “to play upon the stricken Saul” when the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him “and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him,” took place while David was still in Saul’s favour, before the rivalry of youth and age began.

Music stirred Saul out of his dumb misery, but for David victory was not yet. He had played all the old tunes beloved of Saul, and recalled all the old influences of nature, of the marriage chant, the worship of God :

“But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul groaned.”

Then David bent to his purpose the addition of words—of poetry. He sang the song of the native joy of life, the delight in the mere strength of lusty youth, the old joy of swimming, the sensuous, unconscious life, the strength of young manhood, the mere delight in living :

“How good is man’s life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!”

He sings of the love of a child for parents :

"Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose sword
 thou didst guard
 When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for glorious
 reward?
 Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up as
 men sung
 The low song of the newly-departed, and hear her faint
 tongue
 Joining in while it could to the witness, 'Let one more
 attest,
 I have lived, seen God's hand thro' a lifetime, and all was
 for best' ?

This song of home devotion is followed by the song of friendship, of manly success, of kingship :

"And the friends of thy boyhood—that boyhood of wonder
 and hope,
 Present promise and wealth of the future beyond the eye's
 scope,—
 Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is thine;
 And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one head
 combine!
 High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame crowning
 them,—all
 Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—King Saul!"

The spirit of David leaped within him at his own heroic words; his passion of admiration for the great King that Saul had been, awoke in him a mighty compassion—his hope of emotion at last to break the prison of Saul's encasing despair he was bound in as he stood by the tent-prop :

"Caught as in his pangs
 And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,
 Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
 With the spring-time,—so agonised Saul, drear and stark,
 blind and dumb."

The suggestion of Spring is used; and as Saul's misery is broken by the words of David, he was penetrated by its action as he heard its name :

“ Have ye seen when Spring’s arrowy summons goes right to the aim ? ”

The words of the melting of snows, the springing of verdure, the nesting of birds, the coming forth of the goat—all this suggesting of the Spring was the releasing of the soul of Saul :

“ One long shudder thrilled

All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank, and was stilled,

At the King’s self left standing before me, released and aware.”

As Saul’s soul waited between death and life, his mind freed from the evil spirit, David’s soul agonises to find the new spell to occupy the chambers of the mind. What next? What had he to offer to replace the dispossessed spirits of evil exorcised?

“ What spell or what charm,

(For, awhile there was trouble within me) what next should I urge

To sustain him where song had restored him?—Song filled to the verge

His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that it yields

Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty: beyond, on what fields,

Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten the eye

And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the cup they put by?

He saith, ‘ It is good; ’ still he drinks not: he lets me praise life,

Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.”

At this problem of how to fill the mind at peace again with the power to turn from its negative joy, and use itself in positive joy of living again, David’s resource sprang by imagination’s power to its task of lifting the soul beyond itself. He recalled what his busy imagination had done for him as he waited monotonously bound to his shepherd’s task: he recalled the lesson of the eagle’s flight

and far vision, who saw all in ken beneath, while he (David)—

“ Lay in my hollow and mused on the world that might lie
 ‘Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip ‘twixt the hill
 and the sky.”

As he puzzled how to draw Saul’s soul from apathy to life the imaginations of his shepherd life flocked: he recalled all the fancies with which he had peopled the plain and the rocks.

The fancies among which David’s soul had disported in his shepherd life are recalled—the love in life and mind, the hope in death, the promise of immortality in the memory of this great man’s life to generations to come:

“ So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their
 part
 In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God that
 thou art!”

Through this mighty throe of infinite compassion David’s soul rises to a new level, his mind to a new conception—the conception of the Love of God to be grafted on to Israel’s dispensation, the belief of God as a God of Power only. Out of his passion of love, his agony of pity for Saul, David’s mind grasped the conception of love at the heart of Power, weakness in its strength: he uttered the Messianic prophecy of a new Dispensation, that the Love of God would be made manifest to men by Christ in the times to come:

“ ‘Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh,
 that I seek
 In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
 A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
 Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a Hand like this
 hand
 Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the
 Christ stand!”

What happened, says David, was the using of him as

the instrument of God ; the emotion he recounted and related to written words next morning :

“ Lest the terrible glory vanish in sleep.”

The glory which followed came after wave upon wave of compassion for Saul as at last the King resumed his self-possession and pride, and readjusted his kingly raiment and jewellery of his state.

“ He is Saul, ye remember in glory,—ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion.”

At the promise of the praise of posterity, the immortality of his name, the King came to himself, and love for young David at his feet awoke and broke the last spell and mingled with the love of David for him ; and under the scrutiny and caressing, David’s heart yearns desperately to help Saul retrieve the failure of life, to give further life :

“ I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages hence,
As this moment,—had love but the warrant, love’s heart
to dispense !”

So David conceives that God, who has placed compassion in the heart of man, could not be without compassion Himself ; in the Godhead must be the answer to the compassion of man :

“ Would I suffer for him that I love ? So wouldst thou,—so wilt thou !”

From the throes of his mighty compassion for Saul, the Messianic conception flashed into the mind of David. This passion of pity and pain in the mind and soul of David, his rage to restore harmony to soul and health to mind and body, is presented with its saving result upon the soul of Saul, and the addition of that deep mystical reaction, the Divine reflection upon the soul of David, who, through his passion of pity for Saul, stormed the citadel of heaven and came in lightning-flash upon the prophetic conviction of

the Christ to come. David reels out into the night drunken with the splendour of the new conception—the stars beat with emotion—darkness fades to-day's tender birth—the shuddering forest holds its breath—startled beasts bear off—birds rose stiff and heavily :

“ E'en the serpent that slid away silent,—he felt the new law.”

Out of the deep complexity of pain and compassion David sighted that conception which completed intuition, without which rebirth is impossible, of Love in Power—human in the Divine. The Messianic conception Browning postulates arising as response to a soul's impassioned will and agonised desire—supreme pity to relieve the pain of soul of Saul, out of a heart of compassion, of a mind of supreme powers and cognisance of a spiritual past, of a smouldering soul needing but a touch Divine to burst into flame with new conception of a further law. Christ bursts upon the soul of Saul born in the old law of Jehovah : the startling conception, that sent David rapt out into the night, that “ All's Love,” though “ All's Law.”

The poem “ Mesmerism ” deals with the gift of mind and soul and spirit divined by the medieval Paracelsus.

From his hint, handed down through several speculative minds, Mesmer seized and cultivated the idea, which became identified with his name, as “ mesmerism.”

Browning's titles to his poems prepare the mind for the nature of the thought to follow. “ Mesmerism ” loosely indicated a presentment of a certain phenomenon known to the common mind. “ Mesmerism ” was the seizing and cultivating by Mesmer, a French physician, of hints extracted from the philosophy of Paracelsus, the medieval scientist and physician, whose life was popularised by Browning's poem of that name.

Mesmer took as subject for his thesis for degree in 1766, “The Influence of the Planets on the Human Body.” He drew theories derived from Paracelsus into practical operation. The Faculty of Medicine in Paris opposed this treatment of disease, official authority was against him; he died in 1815 at the age of eighty-one after sixty-two years of curative practice.

Mesmer was ridiculed and burlesqued on the stage, was travestied in songs which were circulated throughout Paris. The French Revolution dispersed his disciples and patients and the knowledge of Mesmerism was spread into the refugees’ asylums, and in 1812 Mesmerism was introduced into Prussian hospitals.

Out of Mesmer’s methods came the direct mental treatment of a benevolent Frenchman—the Marquis de Puysegur, who dispensed with all the mechanical aids to the mesmeric sleep. He simply magnetised a big tree, sat his patient under it comfortably waiting for the cure, which arrived as he suggested it should, employing simple suggestion for his cure.

After 1814 magnetism was used in different hospitals in France—Hôtel Dieu, La Salpêtrière, Val de Grace, etc.—and University Professors acknowledged it in their treatises.

In 1825 the Royal Academy of Medicine of France was induced to order a new investigation into mesmerism and magnetism on the ground that “new light may be thrown upon a subject by time, experience, and dispassionate investigation—and that it is always right to review our opinions and test them afresh.” A committee was appointed composed of the ablest and most cautious scientists of this body. One dissentient mind alone was of opinion that the mysterious power was simply the power of imagination.

The conclusion was that certain states did inevitably follow the mesmeric operation, that its phenomena were real—that magnetism as a therapeutic agent, a generator

of physiological phenomena must find its place in the syllabus of medical subjects, and medical men only should practise it, or watch and superintend its employment.

That Browning did not take "mesmerism" at the common valuation of Mesmer and his disciples is hinted at in one of his letters to Miss Barrett describing a French friend "who believed in mesmerism and other falsities."

The "mesmerism" of Mesmer developed from hint of Paracelsus, but the Paracelsian idea had no connection with the mechanical means of development of the idea from Mesmer to Braid—the secret of Paracelsus was a Divine-human quality discerned and exercisable by the spiritual being of man, through the agencies of the Trinity. The imagination of man in Divine co-operation with unseen ethereal forces was the doctrine of Paracelsus, the spirit of Truth itself.

The simple elixir of healing to the medieval Paracelsus, was spiritual faith, and to be operative, must be fixed upon something outside the patient; but that healing was a co-operation of forces. He was the first to draw scientifically to light the indisputable therapeutic power of such faith to cure disease or disorganisation of body or mind: "Whether the object of your faith be true or false, it will operate provided the object is without," is the formula of Paracelsus.

"There are two forces in man," wrote Paracelsus—"one natural, the other of the air, wherein nothing is corporeal. . . . Miserable are mortals to whom Nature has denied the first and best treasure, which the monarchy of Nature contains—the Light of Nature, imagination; by this means man is able in both ways to learn to know and to work—that spirit is born by asking, by searching, by knocking."

Paracelsus, the medieval mystic and pioneer of modern medical knowledge, was the first to use the imagination scientifically in the faith that it is a genuine property of mind, by means of which the soul is related to, and may tap, extensive resources of power, to the uplifting and

exhilarating of the body's processes and soul's progression, conferring further sight by power of the Spirit and the influence of thought upon the mind.

The poem "Mesmerism" of Browning exhibits this mystic property of imagination—a property of the mind of genius, before which it ever stands overawed. It is a possibility of extended power dimly discerned, rarely fully realised, guessed at by the intellect, postulated by minds acutely aware of the insufficiency of intellect to bridge the chasms of evolution and combine the forces of being: to arrive at the "something more" that genius knows and stands related to, is the last gift of the brain's Pandora-box of mysteries, imagination.

In the poem the speaker uses this power of imagination to draw another to his side: by a passionate love and perfect creative will he realises his vision:

"Till I seemed to have and hold,
In the vacancy
'Twixt the wall and me,
From the hair-plait's chestnut gold
To the foot in its muslin fold—

"Having and holding, till
I imprint her fast
On the void at last
As the sun does whom he will
By the calotypist's skill."

So, having imprinted her bodily spell, he must further task his power to see through the veil:

"To her soul and never swerve,
Knitting an iron nerve."

So deep is this power, so subtle this craft, that imagination can further penetrate through body and soul to the spirit; through—

"Essence and earth-attire,
To the source of the tractile fire:

“ For, there ! have I drawn or no
 Life to that lip ?
 Do my fingers dip
 In a flame which again they throw
 On the cheek that breaks a-glow ?

“ On doth she march and on
 To the fancied shape ;
 It is, past escape,
 Herself, now : the dream is done
 And the shadow and she are one.”

And thus having fixed this wonder of his imagination in the void, drawn up the vision to indubitable sight, he thinks of the responsibility of his gift, and—

“ First I will pray. Do Thou
 That ownest the soul,
 Yet wilt grant control
 To another, nor disallow
 For a time, restrain me now !”

It is a great power, this, of his, the speaker feels—may he be guided in the use of it :

“ Since require Thou wilt
 At my hand its price one day !
 What the price is, who can say ?”

The poem “*Memorabilia*” recalls Browning’s early passion for Shelley. He has met someone who knew Shelley in the flesh. His wonder is stirred to speech : to have known personally the spirit he once so worshipped—could one go on living after such a moment, he asks, and have been living before?—how the meeting of one who knew Shelley in person had startled him—and “the starting moves your laughter,” he says to the world.

So moments stand out in life : he recalls one that came to him as he crossed a moor—one momentous experience fixed a hand’s-breadth of it in his mind for ever. There he found something dropped from above—a moulted

feather, an eagle-feather : here confidence stops : “ Well, I forget the rest ! ”

“ Bishop Blougram’s Apology ” was published in the series “ Men and Women ” in 1855. The poem is the apologia of a great Roman Catholic Churchman, conceded by Browning as intended to represent Cardinal Wiseman. It is a long critical analysis of belief, between the great Churchman who believes in the Christian story, and the young journalist sent to interview him who does not “ believe.”

If “ apologist ” be taken in its original worthy definition, then Browning was an apologist for Christianity. “ Apologist ” has come to be conceived to mean special pleading, the interested argument of rhetoric, legal pleading, good-natured tolerance, to acknowledge something with regret, to endeavour to make amends for some offence or incivility or delinquency, to make excuses for anyone or anything supposed to be acting wrongly from interested motives of personal gain, as one might formulate an apologia for slavery who might believe the institution good for slaves although indefensible from the point of view of the natural right of man to be a free agent. In such a case “ apologist ” means an assignment of a reason for an institution which appears to others to be wrong, or seems liable to meet disapprobation or censure from others. Browning used the word as a defence of.

It is in this spirit and meaning that Browning used the word “ apology ” in several of his poems of this time. In “ Fifine-at-the-Fair ” the apology is his own case, his own confessed attempt to catch the individual to his way of thinking ; in “ Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau ” it is apologia for the spirit of compromise in the government of masses of men, with respect to the ordering of states of government ; in “ Bishop Blougram ” it is apologia for a medieval institution—a great form of organised thought, with great forms of organised method, raised to meet

medieval times and medieval conceptions, to make men believe in Christianity.

In 1851 the medieval Church had its high hopes of capturing English thought, as the German lecture-hall also buoyantly hoped success for its propaganda. It was at this time that Browning wrote "Christmas Eve" and, later on, "Bishop Blougram's Apology." Papal aggression was the topic of the hour in England. The Pope was strenuously seeking to establish his authority, with the dream of restoring the Romish hierarchy. Protestant England was filled with alarm, and great meetings were held in protest at the Popish aggression.

The Bishop in the poem was intended to represent Cardinal Wiseman, Browning conceded. The question of Popery or No Popery was the burning question of mid-Victorian politics: a cartoon in *Punch* represented Lord John Manners, Prime Minister of the day, chalking up "No Popery" on a church door.

In 1840, Cardinal Wiseman was consecrated Bishop, and sent to England by the Pope to stimulate Roman Catholic propaganda and hearten up the converts to Rome, then in full tide upon the Oxford Movement. He was appointed Vicar-Apostolic of the London district, and acted as Diplomatic Envoy from the Pope, to ascertain the mind of the English Government towards the policy of the Vatican. An authenticated Envoy was sent to Rome by the English Government, but bore no fruit.

Cardinal Wiseman threw himself into a many-sided activity for restoration of the Roman Catholic position; he had a never-tiring zeal for the establishment of its religious communities, and for the holding of retreats and missions. On July 4, 1848, he preached at the opening of St. George's, Southwark. The progress of Roman Catholicism was rapid: in 1850 a Papal brief established him as Cardinal and Archbishop of Westminster. He issued a pastoral acclaiming the "restoration of Catholic England to its orbit in the ecclesiastical firmament."

Protestant England took fire at this Romish aggression ; so violent was the feeling, that Wiseman's life was supposed to be in some danger. He maintained an attitude of courage and issued an "Appeal to the English People"—a pamphlet of over thirty pages arguing for the principle of toleration. By 1852 the dream of the Pope of the rapid conversion of England to the faith of Rome seemed about to be realised.

It was at this juncture Browning's poem, "Bishop Blougram's Apology," appeared, in which he was supposed to have acted in hostility to the Roman Catholic propaganda. When asked if it had not been intended as a satire on Cardinal Wiseman : "Certainly," he replied cheerfully, "I intended it for Cardinal Wiseman, but I don't consider it a satire." The Hierarchy ban Browning.

In the poem the Bishop presents his case for the Christianity of Hildebrand—he can't be Luther, he says, and his present course is his only one as things are.

But if not for the Reformation, says Gigadibs, he would recommend Strauss. Times are different now ; he advises the Bishop to be sincere. The Bishop grows tired ; he wearies of Gigadibs' glib talk of an easy way out for faith ; he, for his part, acknowledges difficulties of belief ; he admits frankly the uncertainties if looked at intellectually : this is no matter of reasoning—it is elemental quality of the soul to believe, and ignorance and uncertainty have spiritual uses.

Gigadibs, the interviewer of the great Cardinal, is certain in his own mind that the great Churchman doesn't really believe what he teaches—he thinks he is not sincere in his opinion, as he, Gigadibs, is in his. The Churchman knows this idea of the obscure interviewer, and, in tolerance of the journalist's necessity to earn his bread, talks the matter out with him, an interview out of which Gigadibs will emerge with something to boast of for the rest of his life ; he is too tolerant just at that moment to mind the contempt of Gigadibs.

The common problem in life, says Blougram, is how to realise ideals in practical life. You, he says to Gigadibs, have vague beliefs, ideals towards this one or that one—

“ Your grand simple life,
Of which you will not realise one jot ”;

for pure idealism realises nothing, and—

“ The common problem, yours, mine, every one’s,
Is not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be,—but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means : a very different thing! ”

Recognise your limitations, says the great man, and work within them and so enlarge them :

“ First, you don’t believe, you don’t and can’t,
In any revelation called divine.
I know where difficulties lie.
I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,
So give up hope accordingly to solve.
What are we? unbelievers both.
How can we guard our unbelief,
Make it bear fruit to us?—the problem here.”

The great Bishop had put the case for his faith in the simile of a cabin being fitted up for a long sea-voyage, a cabin easily overcrowded—you cannot take all you possess. He begins with suavity to reply to this young disbeliever, who, concede the fact, he says lightly :

“ You do despise me . . . you would not be I.
You would like better to be Goethe, now,
Or Buonaparte, or, bless me, lower still,
Count D’Orsay.”

Step by step the great believer leads the young disbeliever on—step by step demolishes the argument which he has himself raised—arguments for disbelief, atheism, doubt. He begs Gigadibs have just a doubt of himself. There’s nothing gained on the denying side, and faith may work, disbelief may not; and how guard your unbelief with such eruptive forces beneath life? Just when your safest something of beauty or emotion or poetry

arises, or death faces you and your unbelief is undone,
and hopes and fears old and new as Nature's self rise :

"To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,
The grand Perhaps! . . .

* * * * *

This good God,—what he could do, if he would,
Would, if he could—then must have done long since:
If so, when, where, and how? some way must be,—
Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
Some sense, in which it might be, after all.
Why not, 'The Way, the Truth, the Life'?"

The Bishop essays another analogy for faith—the deceptions of sight of a road going up a mountain from below, which looks so straight and unbroken: to see this truth, he says, is the stumbling-block from below. He reverts to the cabin simile to help out this interview with Gigadibs as to his belief, which Gigadibs has doubt of and won't be convinced of. He gets a long review of the Bishop's opinions, who puts up the argument and knocks it over as well—so contemptuous is he of Gigadibs—Gigadibs who can't and won't believe, and the great Churchman whose creed is that—

"Enthusiasm's the best thing, only we can't command it.

* * * * *

"The fact's the same,—belief's fire, once in us."

"What think ye of Christ, friend?" he asks.

"Like you this Christianity or not?
It may be false, but will you wish it true?
Has it your vote to be so if it can?

Pure faith indeed—you know not what you ask!
Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,
Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much."

Such fulness of power

"would wither up at once—

"The mind confronted with the truth of Him.
The feeblest sense is trusted most; the child
Feels God a moment, ichor's o'er the place."

* * * * *

" You'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,
 In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.
 How you'd exult if I could put you back
 Six hundred years! . . .

* * * * *

" How act? As other people felt and did;
 With soul more blank than this decanter's knob,
 Believe—and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate
 Full in belief's face."

Not for the Middle Ages of lawlessness and form, is the great Bishop, but the present soul stage he advises for Gigadibs :

" No, when the fight begins within himself,
 A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
 Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—
 He's left, himself, in the middle: the soul wakes
 And grows."

The Bishop traversed fearlessly the grounds of his organisation for believing itself especially supported in its methods. He traversed the lives of its founders, the mystery of its miracles, is not afraid, even, of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarias, and reminds Gigadibs what difficult grounds he, too, has for his faith—Strauss with his " Lieber Jesu," Fichte with his clever cut at God Himself—

" To write your lively sketch—be the first
 Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence."

The great man concludes by asking Gigadibs—

" To discontinue—not detesting, not
 Defaming, but at least—despising me."

In parting shot he gets in his advice in Biblical allusion: the poet hopes now he has " studied his last chapter of St. John."

" A Grammarian's Funeral" opens the trilogy of Browning's greatest poems. With " Abt Vogler," the

mystic's manual, and “Rabbi Ben Ezra,” the textbook of Christian philosophy, it reflects the highest and truest, the deepest and most searching, of Browning's philosophies of life. These poems have constructive forces, dynamic agencies, imperative influences, and are the avowed guides to the present heroic in life, the confessed beacons to the heights of thousands: self-confessed in biography grateful for the influences of these poems. In them the hope of “Pippa Passes” is realised.

“A Grammarian's Funeral” is the concrete expression of the heroic in intellect and soul. It is the friend and companion of the heroisms and adventures of life, the guide and comfort of intellect and spirit, the sustainer of the mind and soul of man. The poem sweeps its mighty way from the level and low to the heights, melting into the blue—its pedant earth aim rises to transcendental devotion, its lofty risks challenge low security:

“He (soul hydroptic with a sacred thirst)
Sucked at the flagon.”

Every stanza of the “Grammarian's Funeral” embodies law, mental or transcendental, which will work, which will produce results that will lift being from the lowland to the highland, that will either end trouble or break trouble; it is electric with possibilities, and is the eulogy of a disciple to his great master. This master has ground at his grammar under the surprises of frost and rain when summer should have been. How should spring take note winter would follow? He went on with his learning under failure, in pride of his pursuit. He would feast on learning to its crumbs; he grows cramped, withered; his cough hinders, his vitality fails, but “dead from the waist down,” he still lives the great life of research. Nameless and unknown, he lived for his learning: no payment on account for him; failure was unnoticed; the delights of the Now paled before the light of the Forever. He but bent the deeper over his books, forgot that bronchitis

racked him, stone attacked him, pain gripped him, death throttled him, still by the dynamics of mind and spirit :

“ Ground he at Grammar.”

In two lines the old Grammarian packs the secret of genius :

“ Earn the means first—God surely will contrive
Use for our earning.”

“ What’s time?” says the faith and vision of the old Grammarian :

“ Leave Now for dogs and apes !
Man has Forever.”

Browning’s intellectual and spiritual faiths meet in “ A Grammarian’s Funeral,” from know how to wait of genius :

“ Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
Heedless of far gain,
Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
Bad is our bargain !”

to the great spiritual promise to high purpose to the sky when the ground purposes of earth are secured :

“ That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred’s soon hit :
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.
That, has the world here—should he need the next,
Let the world mind him !
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find Him.”

During these years Browning appears to have turned his attention to another form of art expression : his poetry at this time met little to encourage it.

“ He has given a great deal of time,” wrote Mrs. Browning in 1860, “ to anatomy with reference to the expression of form, and the modelling in clay is only the new medium which takes the place of drawing. . . . Robert is peculiar

in his ways of work as a poet . . . he waits for an inclination, works by fits and starts; he can't do otherwise, he says, and his head is full of ideas which are to come out in clay or marble. . . . There has been little poetry done since last winter; the modelling combines body-work and soul-work. . . . He has material for a volume, and will work at it this summer, he says.

“At the same time, his treatment in England affects him, naturally,—and, for my part, I set it down as an infamy of that public—no other words.

“ . . . I don't complain for myself of an unappreciating public, I have no reason. But just for that reason I complain more about Robert . . . To *you* I may say that the blindness, deafness, and stupidity of the English public to Robert are amazing. Of course Milsand had heard his name—well, the contrary would have been strange. Robert *is*. All England can't prevent his existence, I suppose. . . . As a sort of lion Robert has his range in society—and, for the rest, you should see Chapman's returns! While in America he is a power, a writer, a poet—he is read—he lives in the heart of the people.”—*Letter of Mrs. Browning to Miss Browning*.

The sculptor with whom Browning modelled was Mr. W. W. Story, the American. In “W. W. Story and his Friends,” by Henry James, interesting glimpses are given of Browning and his wife's life in Florence. “There is no one to supply his place,” wrote Story of Browning, when he left Florence after his wife's death.

In spite of his unremunerative work, Browning's circumstances had become easy. In 1851, Mr. Kenyon, Mrs. Browning's cousin, had bequeathed to them a substantial legacy: six thousand five hundred pounds to Browning and four thousand five hundred pounds to Mrs. Browning, to whom he had also allowed a hundred a year from the birth of her child.

CHAPTER IV

BIOGRAPHICAL

Death of Mrs. Browning at Florence—Poet and his son return to England—Life at Warwick Crescent—Devotion to his son's education—Mrs. Sutherland Orr, his personal friend and first biographer—Mr. Edmund Gosse—"Personalities of Browning"—Return to social life in London—His dual life—Poet, philosopher, mystic—Man of the world—Deeply secretive, yet outgoing and cordial—Creations of his brain his real world—Mystic and humanitarian.

MRS. BROWNING died unexpectedly on the night of June 29, 1861. Of her death her husband wrote to a friend :

"God took her to himself as you would lift a sleeping child from a dark uneasy bed into your arms and the light."

"The friend who was nearest to Mr. Browning in this great and sudden sorrow," says Mrs. Sutherland Orr, "was Miss Blagden—Isa Blagden, as she was called by all her intimates. . . . She was for many years a centre of English society; it was she who shared the grief at Casa Guidi; she took the little boy to her home and induced his father to spend the nights there."

"Miss Blagden went to Mr. Browning in his terrible desolation," says Lady Ritchie, "and did what little a friend could to help them. Day after day and for two or three nights, she watched by the stricken pair until she was relieved."

Mrs. Browning was laid to rest in the Protestant Cemetery, Florence. Her grave, with its monument designed by Sir Frederick Leighton, is the point of pilgrimage to the lovers of the poets. A resting-place in Westminster Abbey beside her husband was offered her at his death, but not accepted by the family. On Casa Guidi wall is inscribed the tribute of the Florentines to

Mrs. Browning, "who of her Verse made a golden link between England and Italy."

After the death of Mrs. Browning in Casa Guidi, their home in Florence, on the night of June 29, 1861, Browning returned to England to make a home there for himself and little son.

"Life must be begun anew," he wrote to his most intimate friend in Italy, W. W. Story, the sculptor—"life must now be begun anew—all the old cast off and the new one put on. I shall go away, break up everything, go to England, and live and work and write."

He began his English life in lodgings which Miss Arabella Barrett had engaged for him, but the discomfort was great, and within a few months he was settled in the house at Warwick Crescent, where he lived for twenty-five years, where all his remaining poems were written, excepting his last series, "Asolando."

Life must be begun again, he wrote. He returned to England with his little son, "to face the world again like the man he was," says Mrs. Sutherland Orr, from whose Biography of Robert Browning authentic information of the personal side of the poet's life may be gleaned.

Mrs. Orr made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Browning in Italy, and continued her friendship with the poet and his sister at Warwick Crescent: she wrote a "Handbook to Browning" at the request of the Browning Society, which went into five editions. The preface to the fifth, issued after Browning's death, summarises her view of Browning and his work.

Mrs. Sutherland Orr was the sister of Frederick Leighton, who became Sir Frederick Leighton, finally Lord Leighton—the celebrated artist who designed Mrs. Browning's monument in the English cemetery at Florence.

Mrs. Orr and Frederick Leighton were the children of Dr. Leighton, whose father, Sir James Leighton, was Court Physician to the Czar at St. Petersburg. He was joined there by his son, who, it was expected, would

succeed his father as Court Physician, but the climate not suiting him, he remained a few years only. His daughter Fanny, who died young, and Alexandra, called after the Empress Alexandra, were born at St. Petersburg. Alexandra became the wife of Colonel Sutherland Orr, who was the cousin of Lord Loch. He and Alexandra Leighton were married in the year 1857. She went through the Indian Mutiny with her husband, and was only saved from death by the exertions of the gallant Sheik Boram Bukh, to whom Lord Leighton wrote, thanking him for his fidelity to his sister that perilous night at Aurungabad. Colonel Sutherland Orr died at Rome in 1860; a monument to his memory designed by Lord Leighton marks his resting-place.

Mrs. Orr's portrait, painted by Lord Leighton, is of a noble-featured woman, with an atmosphere of idealism and simple dignity shadowing a thoughtful brow. The portrait was hung in the Academy of 1861. Mrs. Orr was a devoted sister; though of delicate health, she was at the bedside of her brother during his last hours. She, with her sister, inherited Lord Leighton's fortune.

"Browning's genius," she wrote, in the preface to her "Handbook," "consisted of an almost unlimited power of imagination exerted upon real things—he imagines vividly because he observes keenly and also feels strongly; and this vividness of his nature puts him in equal sympathy with the real and the ideal, the seen and the unseen.

"His treatment of visible and of invisible realities constitutes him respectively a dramatic and a metaphysical poet; his genius always shows itself as dramatic and metaphysical at the same time. The thinking of his men and women habitually tends to a practical result: everything which he, as a poet, thinks or feels, comes from him in a dramatic—that is to say, a completely living form. Thought or spirit is with him the ultimate fact of existence; there is an ultimate mystery which he calls Divine thought. He is convinced that uncertainty is essential to spiritual life; and his works are saturated by the idea that where uncertainty ceases imagination must begin. He believes that the circumstances of life are as much adapted to the guidance of each separate soul as if each were the single object of creature care; and

that therefore, while the individual knows nothing of the Divine scheme, he is everything in it.

"Love of love does more than colour his view of life—it converts a pure Theism into a mystical Christianity. The Deity, he believes, can only be reached through the human emotions: love is the necessary channel. Christ is a message of Divine love—indispensable, and therefore true. He is, as such, a spiritual mystery far more than a definable or dogmatic fact.

"His optimism takes the individual, and not the race, for its test and starting-point, and he places the tendency to good in a creative power which is outside both, and which deals directly with each separate soul, and fulfils itself through good and evil—the soul seeing through evil that good is best. His moral influence lies in the hopeful religious spirit which his works reveal: it is important to realise how elastic this is, and what seeming contradiction it is competent to unite.

"He values thought more than expression, matter more than form; and, judging him from a strictly poetic point of view, he has lost his balance in this direction, as so many have lost it in the opposite direction. He has never meant to be, but he has become so in the exercise of his strength. He has never intended to be obscure, but he has become so from the condensation of style which was the excess of significance and strength. He has never ignored beauty, but he has neglected it in his desire for significance. He was not only an earnest worker, but a solitary one. His genius removed him from the first from that sphere of popular sympathy in which the tendency to excess would have been corrected—the distance, like the mental habit, was self-increasing under the literary obtuseness of England fifty years ago.

"It is thus that Mr. Browning explains the eccentricities of his style; and his friends know that, beyond the point of explaining them, he does not defend them. He has never blamed his public for accusing him of obscurity or ugliness. He has only thought those wrong who taxed him with being wilfully ugly or obscure. He began early to defy public opinion, because his best endeavours had failed to conciliate it, and he would never conciliate it at the expense of what he believed to be the true principles of his art."

Mrs. Orr's summing up of Browning, in her preface to the "Handbook," came under Browning's own supervision. This presentment of his mind and art has authentic note of a personal permission of the poet to stand: "He

but corrected," says Mrs. Orr in her preface to the second edition, "certain historical inaccuracies relating to 'The Statue and the Bust' and 'Pictor Ignotus.' " The second edition was accompanied by two signed notes by the poet, who promised further information for the fifth edition, but this he always put off and death suddenly removed him. "He always put off giving the further information," writes Mrs. Orr, "and I had never the heart to say: 'It would be safer to give it now.' "

"The Browning family," Mrs. Orr writes in her preface to the fifth edition of her "Handbook," "connect themselves by their coat of arms to the Captain Micaiah Browning who raised the siege of Derry in 1689 by springing the boom across Lough Foyle, and perished in the act. Another probable ancestor is the Captain Browning who commanded the ship *Holy Ghost*, which conveyed Henry V. to France before he fought the Battle of Agincourt; and in return for whose services two waves, said to represent waves of the sea, were added to the coat of arms. The same arms were worn by Captain Micaiah Browning, and are so by the present family."

In 1890, one year after Browning's death, Mrs. Orr was at her work of writing her "Life of Browning." Her information is first-hand: she was the friend of Mr. and Mrs. Browning during their Continental life. She was close friend, then and later, of Miss Browning, who had been her brother's amanuensis in early life, but returned to keep house for her brother in his widowed life after their father's death. She shared the poet's life, and was his devoted companion in the home at Warwick Crescent, and in the summer holidays year after year, as recorded by Mrs. Orr: "Miss Browning came to live with her brother, and was thenceforward his inseparable companion."

Miss Browning survived her brother. She died in Venice, on April 22, 1903.

Mrs. Orr relates that she met the little son, Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning, in the winter of 1855-56.

She relates domestic incidents of the family life at Florence, and describes the child as being like his mother, and sharing his father's love of music and animals, father and mother sharing in the education of their son, "Penini"—the family pet name.

On the death of Mrs. Browning, Browning wrote to his friend Leighton :

"I shall go away from Italy for many a year—to Paris, then London for a day or two, just to talk with her sister—but if I can see you it will be a great satisfaction. Don't fancy I am 'prostrated'—I have enough to do for the boy and myself in carrying out her wishes. . . . After my day or two at London I shall go to some quiet place in France to get right again, and then stay some time at Paris in order to find out leisurely what will be best for Peni. But eventually I shall go to England, I suppose—but no more housekeeping for me, even with my family."

Browning returned to London after two months in France. He tried the experiment of lodgings: this was not a success. He set about finding a house, and settled in the house at Warwick Crescent—for one reason, because it was near the house of Miss Arabella Barrett.

Warwick Crescent was entirely unsuitable to Browning after his Continental life, says Mrs. Orr; "its surroundings were sordid and ugly. His life at this time was unutterably dreary, he lived it out sustained by frequent absences and the dream of returning to Italy":

"My end of life and particular reward for myself, will be one day, years hence, to just go back to Italy, to Rome, and die as I lived when I used really to live."—*Letter of R. Browning to W. W. Story.*

His boy's education was his own care; he had not any social distractions then, Miss Barrett his only regular visitor. Miss Barrett had been his wife's favourite sister; she was deeply religious, devoted to charitable projects. One of her organisations which she founded in 1850 was the first School and Refuge for destitute children.

In this work Browning co-operated with her and wrote the little poem "The Twins" to aid the cause of giving to charity.

Browning frankly confessed his past when giving Mr. Gosse the materials for his "Personalia" in 1871—a step rendered necessary, much as he disliked giving the public any information about himself. He consented reluctantly, saying, "I am willing to give you all the facts I can. I am tired of this tangle of facts and fancies." After giving a great mass of facts, he characteristically thought better of it, and much of it of extreme interest was struck out, writes Mr. Gosse. In those interviews he touched with "slight irony on the entirely unintelligible 'Sordello'" and the forlorn hopes of "Bells and Pomegranates."

With "complete frankness," writes Mr. Gosse, Browning described the long-drawn desolateness of his early and middle life as a literary man: how after certain spirits had seemed to rejoice in his first sprightly runnings, and especially in "Paracelsus," a blight had fallen upon his very admirers. Browning's creations were his real world, writes Mr. Gosse in his "Personalia of Robert Browning":

"They were the children of his brain, were absolute knowledge to him. He could discuss acquaintances languidly, but passed into vivid and passionate apology for an act of his own Colombe. His creations were his real world, the region of truth; the actual world was conventional and superficial, but he rarely even in intimacy talked of the children of his brain. Long as he lived, he did not live long enough for one of his ideals to vanish, for one of his enthusiasms to lose its heat. Browning's creative speed was of uncommon interest; he could hear a story which had for him 'stuff for a poem,' and he left it in five minutes completed—foundations, main fabric, even to dome, pinnacles, and spires, needing nothing but the outward crust of versification."

"It is almost a necessity with imaginative genius," comments Mr. Gosse, "to require support from without; sympathy, admiration, amusement, must be constantly poured in to balance the creative evaporation. But Mr. Browning demanded no such tribute. He rather hastened forward with

both hands full of entertainment for the new-comer, anxious to please rather than hoping to be pleased."

In later life, in the sequestered Fellows' Garden, of Trinity, Cambridge, one fine day in June, writes Mr. Gosse, "he spoke for more than two hours of his early aspirations—how he marvelled at the audacious obstinacy of these days of youth when he determined to be a poet, and nothing but a poet. To him the whole world was full of vague possibilities and interests," is the comment of Mr. Gosse; "he was a combination of ever eruptive force and humanity."

Mr. Gosse writes :

"I had the happiness of seeing him very frequently; for twelve years I was his close neighbour. I had several times ventured to point out to him how valuable would be some authentic account of his life, but he always put the suggestion from him. I collected a great mass of facts, gossip, and opinion, which I submitted to him. Much of it was rejected, much of it of extreme interest, but he asked me to destroy it all, and of course I loyally did so. Thus the 'Early Career of Robert Browning' was inspired, partly dictated, revised, and approved of by himself."

"Literary history," writes Mr. Gosse, "is a very different thing from personal history, and there are facts about the development of a poet's intellect and the direction it took, about which curiosity is perfectly justified."

It was in the spring of 1863, according to Mr. Gosse, that Browning suddenly resolved to throw himself into social life in London in which he thenceforward played an increasingly active part. Mr. Henry James, in his book "W. W. Story and his Friends," says :

"It was not easy to meet him and know him without some resort to the supposition that he had literally mastered the secret of dividing the personal consciousness into a pair of independent compartments.

"The man of the world—the man who was good enough for the world, such as it was, walked abroad, showed himself, talked right reasonably, abounded, multiplied his contracts, and did his duty: the man of 'Dramatic Lyrics,' of 'Men and Women,' of 'The Ring and the Book,' of 'A Blot on

the 'Scutcheon,' of 'Pippa Passes,' of 'Colombe's Birthday,' of everything more or less of the order of these,—this inscrutable personage sat at home and knew as well as he might in what quarters of that sphere to look for suitable company."

He was "outcoming and cordial," says Lady Ritchie; "his carved writing-tables were covered with letters. 'What, all these to answer? I am worn out with writing letters; you can have no conception of what I have to answer.'"

Paternal duty, says Mrs. Orr, established Browning in London.

"The growing boy's education occupied a considerable part of his time and thoughts, for he had determined *not* to send him to school, but, as far as possible, himself prepare him for the University. He must also, in some degree, have supervised his recreations. He had therefore, for the present, little leisure for social distractions, and probably at first very little inclination for them."

CHAPTER V

"*DRAMATIS PERSONÆ*"

Tribute to Mrs. Browning—Browning's faith in a future life uttered personally—Legend of medieval faith—Poems of mysticism and philosophy—Paradox—Promises of mysticism and philosophy—Intuition higher than reason—Problem of differing points of view—Reality to differing minds equally true—Mysticism a shaping law—Contrasting developments of human being the high man and the low man—Musician—Philosopher—Caliban—Christian mysticism—Personal confessions—Examination of the claims of the Medium—Apologia for organised faith—Medieval Christianity examined—Advice to scepticism of the interviewer of the great man.

In 1864 was published the collection of poems "*Dramatis Personæ*." These were: "James Lee"; "Gold Hair: A Legend of Pornic"; "The Worst of It"; "Dis Aliter Visum; or, Le Byron de nos Jours"; "Too Late"; "Abt Vogler"; "Rabbi Ben Ezra"; "A Death in the Desert"; "Caliban upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island"; "Confessions"; "May and Death"; "Prospice"; "Youth and Art"; "A Face"; "A Likeness"; "Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium'"; "Apparent Failure"; "Epilogue."

"Prospice" is a poem touching the personal loss of the poet by the death of his wife in 1861. It was written the following year.

The lines face the black minute of soul's severance from the body's life—face the Arch Fear. The poem utters words of courageous and intense defiance of the thought of the annihilation of soul by death. The poet says all will be faced with the eyes open; a challenge will be given; a battle fought, if it must be: then the post of the foe will be taken, the victory attained, then reunion with the

lost one achieved. It is an impassioned affirmation of his belief in his life after death :

“ O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!”

In 1864, three years after his wife's death, Browning published “ Mr. Sludge, ‘ The Medium.’ ” The question of the Medium, the *bona fides* of Home, the Medium, had been the one disturbing element between Mr. and Mrs. Browning; the poem was written in 1859-60.

“ When I am pained,” Browning had written to Miss Barrett in the early days of their correspondence, “ I must write it out—*must*.”

Perhaps to relieve his pain, and thrash out the question that had been the only cloud on their perfect marriage relations in Florence, was the root of this work which he threw himself into these years before his wife's death : to probe the question of the “ Medium.” In a letter to a friend of Mrs. Browning, who had written to her upon the subject of Browning's belief in Spiritualism, Mrs. Browning replies for herself : “ Robert won't believe, he says, till he sees and hears with his own senses. . . . Our opinions,” she added, “ are frankly different.”

Browning had been at the séance alluded to by this friend with Mrs. Browning, and had witnessed the performance of Home, the famous Medium. Browning wrote about their experiences at the séance, and wrote in the third person to a friend of Mrs. Browning in reply to her request for his opinion on what they had seen at the séance :

“ Mr. Browning did in company with his wife witness Mr. Home's performances at —— on the night Miss De Gaudrian alludes to, and he is hardly able to account for the fact that there can be another opinion than his own on the matter—that being that the whole display of ‘ hands,’ spirit utterances, etc., were a cheat and imposture. Mr. Browning believes in the sincerity and good faith of the —— family,

and regrets proportionately that benevolent worthy people should be subjected to the consequences of these admirable qualities of benevolence and worth unaccompanied by a grain of worldly wisdom, or indeed Divine wisdom, either of which would dispose of all this melancholy stuff in a minute. Mr. Browning has, however, abundant experience that the best and rarest of nature may begin by the proper mistrust of the more ordinary results of reasoning when employed in such investigations as these; go on to an abnegation of the regular tests of truth and rationality in favour of these particular experiments—and end in a voluntary prostration of the whole intelligence before what is assumed to transcend all intelligence. Once arrived at this point no trick is too gross; absurdities are referred to ‘low spirits,’ falsehoods to ‘personating spirits’—and the One terribly apparent spirit—the father of lies—has it all his own way. Mr. Browning had some difficulty in keeping from an offensive expression of his feelings at Mr. —’s. He has since seen Mr. Home and relieved himself. Mr. Browning recommends leaving the business to its natural termination, and will console himself for any pain to the dupes by supposing that their eventual profit in improved intelligence would be not otherwise procurable.”

It is said that Browning would go white with rage at the mention of Spiritualism.

Upon the subject of Spiritualism Mr. and Mrs. Browning had to agree to differ. It was thought that in addition to believing that the Medium’s manifestations were deception and jugglery, after taking part in the séances, he also resented his wife’s name being associated with the performances, where she was often singled out for the Medium’s special notice. Mrs. Browning could not believe her husband was in earnest: he went into the investigation with an open mind, and had had a curious experience to relate of a clairvoyant, because of which he was ready to believe that there was more to know in the matter of human psychology. The story of the truthful result of one clairvoyant’s divination, and the trickery of another, probably helped him to the conclusion of the matter in the poem “Mr. Sludge, ‘The Medium.’” But that the something that was at its origin veritably truth, which started

the Medium on his course, was not spirits of the dead, he was convinced.

Browning believed he had detected the fraud and trickery of Home. He conceded him the "something" upon which his fabric was built. But as a sainted mother was called up, the enquirer's passion boiled; the Medium was seized by the throat:

"R-r-r, you brute-beast and blackguard!
Cowardly scamp!"

says Sludge, as he escaped from the fit of passion. "My turn next," he threatens: "I too can tell my story." And the poet tells the Medium's story as he believed it to be.

The poem of "Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium,'" while denying the part of spirits of the dead as the agents of certain phenomena, is a vindication of unknown agencies at work under matter; it is a statement that esoteric gifts are true of men of certain mystic temperament who arrive at a greater measure of certainty of the reality of the unseen world than others—experience which gives such certainty to faith that it becomes a truth to be conjured with:

"Religion's all or nothing,
No mere smile of contentment—sigh of aspiration."

Browning believed that Home, the Medium, had used this power to deceive, and exploit the tenderest relations of humanity. On some undoubted supranormal endowment he raised this superstructure of the false, because the simple phenomenon was not wonderful enough to satisfy his followers. That is the conclusion of the poem and summing up of the question by Browning. The Medium thrives because souls lack faith, and there is a real love of a lie in the human heart, says Sludge.

Home, the Medium, was convicted of undue influence and fraud in obtaining a gift of £24,000 from a Mrs. Lyon under the supposed influence of the spirit of her husband:

the alleged spirit had urged her, as the supposed “control” of Home, to adopt him and give him £700 a year. A letter written by Mrs. Lyon under Home’s influence was produced in evidence that the transaction was an entirely free gift. The case was decided against Home, who was discredited morally on the facts. The case of *Lyon v. Home* is in Law Report, 6 Equity, 655. Mrs. Lyon was a widow of seventy-five, with property worth £90,000. The Medium asserted that her husband was his “control,” who ordered her to adopt him and transfer her property to him. She did not adopt him, but made a transfer by deeds and her will. Action was taken to compel him to give up the money, which was successful. His defence was that the gifts were recalled because of the immorality of his life with her. England became impossible for him : he practised on the Continent in later life.

Because Browning found the Medium Home to be a cheat and swindler in his manifestations before the circle of enquirers at Florence, because he believed his superstructure was lies, and a cruel cheat was perpetrated on his wife’s father’s spirit being supposedly raised at his séances—which he and she considered an outrage upon the situation as it lay between them at Mr. Barrett’s death—he hated the Medium. This weakened Mrs. Browning’s belief, and added to the indignation of Browning. “Mr. Sludge, ‘The Medium,’” was written in a rage at what he believed the superstructure of lies of Home ; it is also a great exposition of the truth at the root of, and the credulity of, enquirers into the psychic intuition : David Home cheated because he “found fools ready made.” And yet Sludge knows and sees and hears a hundred things you all are blind to, is his apologia. This poem is a plea for the psychic sense of the unseen, for the cloud of coincidence which arises in types of mind built that way. Is it a development of the flesh, that faculty for a generalisation which makes you “think yourself The one i’ the

world, the one for whom the world was made"? Out of which vague impressions, says Sludge, truth arises. He can't explain (he'll tell you smilingly), and he's too much of a philosopher—

"To count as supernatural, indeed,
So calls a puzzle and problem, proud of it—
Bidding you still be on your guard, you know,
Because one fact don't make a system stand,
Nor prove this an occasional escape
Of spirit beneath the matter: that's the way!"

As gold was discovered grain by grain, says Sludge, so truth from intuitions:

"I take the fact, the grain of gold
And fling away the dirty rest of life,
And add this grain to the grain each fool has found
O' the million other such philosophers,—
Till I see gold, all gold and only gold,
Truth questionless though unexplainable,
And the miraculous proved the commonplace!"

Because a boy says he sees horses and chariots in the sky, does it follow there was nothing there?—

"Say, I was born with flesh as sensitive,
Soul so alert, that, practice helping both,
I guess what's going on outside the veil,
Just as a prisoned crane feels pairing-time
In the islands where his kind are, so must fall
To capering by himself some shiny night,
As if your back-yard were a plot of spice—
Thus am I 'ware o' the spirit-world."

"Apparent Failure" is a poem saving "the Doric little Morgue" on the banks of the Seine from its threatened oblivion. "I will save it," says the poet: he saves it, and the three poor denizens of its building as he drew it—from the building to the purpose of it, and beyond to the illimitable hope that what is apparent failure behind the screen of glass is not the last word of the story, for the three worsted by life, apparently failures, would next life

atone. Their reach was high, their ambition lofty—idealists swept under in the human tide of common life. “Is this failure only apparent—only for the present life?” soliloquises the poet. He leaves “the Doric little Morgue” to its new lease of life by his poem.

“The Worst of It” is a poem descriptive of placing the worst of this tragedy at the door of the husband who wedded his young wife, buying her love, as he saw when too late. It was his fault, he saw after the tragedy, that his beautiful swan had its beauty spoiled: a smirch would have passed unnoticed in a crow, but a fleck in a swan is beauty irrevocably spoiled; and the crows will hurt his swan—this is his sorrow, this is the worst of it. He prays she may work out her penance and reach heaven pure at last: he will still love.

The poem “St. Martin’s Summer” is the reflection in married life that after its storm and stress, and perhaps the alienated affection of middle life, still in the end remember the promise of a St. Martin’s Summer—that brief space of bright, warm, serene weather of the late autumn in England generally to be reckoned on. Expect St. Martin’s Summer, says Shakespeare. The time it may be expected is from October 9th to November 11th—St. Martin’s Day.

“Dîs Aliter Visum; or, Le Byron de nos Jours” takes for keynote the lines from Virgil which mean “Heaven thought otherwise.” It is a poem of a lost opportunity for two young people. The man and woman were prudent; they failed their chance and lived sundered lives, pursuing ambitions in pursuit of fame. She was young, he was old; both were unequal to their chance. Each lacked faith to overlook obvious deterrents. She let him

go, married without love. He chose a lesser love, became an Academician; she, a famous dancer. Life for each was void at heart: worldly prudence triumphed. Perhaps Heaven thought otherwise of the present-day lovers—contrasting with the Byronic romance of the past.

“Youth and Art” is a meditation on the what-might-have-been. Two lovers had their chance of union, missed it. He had dreams of greatness to achieve, she had visions of triumph to raise the envy of her colleagues. They were both poor, lived from hand to mouth, as artists must; they but glanced at each other with love, longing only. She posed at her window for him, he tried to respond; she was jealous of his models, and showed off the foreigner who came to tune her piano as a set-off. Life passed, neither achieved great success: she married a rich old lord; he became an R.A., was knighted. But neither life is complete; they should have seized life and been happy: this was missed, and their lives hung patchy and scrappy.

The subject of seizing the moment of love—of young people securing joy by first love, uniting in faith and trust, braving the future together—is again the subject of Browning’s art, as in “*Dís Aliter Visum*”—the cold worldly prudence that sacrifices love to worldly success is to lose the key of happiness, say both poems.

“A Likeness” is a poem descriptive of a young man’s secrecy round the picture of a face. It depicts, with realistic recollection of student days, all the surroundings of active young manhood devoted to sport, to study, and to art—a picture of a student’s room as Browning himself would have known it during his brief space of study at Guy’s Hospital.

There was a time, too, during his dramatic experiences when he had lodgings near the theatre, to be at hand for consultation over the production of his plays. The poem

represents the owner, a bachelor, entertaining a guest. He shows him his pictures, his portfolio of prints. One portrait is slurred past. “Who?” said the other. “She seemed interesting. Why this secrecy? Who is she?”

The poem “A Face” is a personal poem, this “face” in question being that of an early friend—perhaps the boyish love of Browning, perhaps the fellow-conspirator of the touching picture of old age turning back to the first thrilling secrecies to wonder again at youthful love in the poem “Confessions.” First love, its loss by chance and change, its restrictions and surveillances, are the theme of several of Browning’s poems at this time—all the passionate secrecies of the young to guard its love from prying elders are round the picture of young love in the poem “Confessions.” The early love may have been she whose “face” is here reproduced with admiration.

The “face” commemorated is that of the daughter of the Rev. W. Andrews, whose chapel lay near the early home of Browning. Miss Andrews, at the age of twenty-two, married Mr. Coventry Patmore, and died in 1862. The lines were written in her album by Browning before her death. She was twelve years younger than Browning, one of a large family whose mother died young. She went for some years to the care of an aunt. Her elder sisters are credited with having tyrannized over her.

This early friend of Browning is also handed down to posterity in the poem of her husband, “The Angel in the House.” In the poem their domestic life is raised by art to a serious and beautiful appreciation by the poet to the memory of his wife.

“Too Late” is a poem of poignant regret for a woman the man speaking had lost by death. He yearns to help her even in her grave : he would warm her cold heart with

his. She married and left the warmth of his heart in life. The even flow of his life stopped for a time, but now she is dead he may think of the rocks the devil brushed into his stream of life and parted souls made for each other. For a time he dreamed of the obstacles removed—but she is dead now. What caused the parting of their ways? Was it his pride? Was it paralysis of will? But she is dead now, and he may think of her and help in her cold grave by his warmth of emotion, perhaps.

The poem "Orpheus and Eurydice" was written for Sir Frederick Leighton's picture of that classical subject, exhibited in the Royal Academy of 1864. It was first printed in the Catalogue of that date under the picture.

The title of the poem in the Catalogue was afterwards changed to that of "Eurydice to Orpheus." It represents the Orpheus of Grecian mythology recovering his wife Eurydice from the lower regions after her death from the bite of a serpent. On condition that he did not look back, the power had been granted him. He disregarded the condition, under the charm of Eurydice's words to him, and she returned to Hades again.

This changing round of persons in renaming his poems is characteristic of Browning, as "Porphyria's Lover" was at first printing "Porphyria."

The poem "Deaf and Dumb" was first printed in the volume of "Selections" published in 1868. It is another poem called forth by a work of art—the group of statuary by Woolner, exhibited at the International Exhibition of 1862. The children were Constance and Arthur, son and daughter of Sir Thomas Fairbairn. It expresses the characteristic faith of Browning in the apparent defects of life carrying compensations. Without obstructions to break upon, light cannot break to prismatic beauty: from the obstructions of the atmosphere, the glory of the rain-

bow ; from deafness and dumbness may Love speak : “ Its insuppressive sense on brow and cheek.”

The poem “James Lee’s Wife” (first called “James Lee”) is the story of an uncongenial marriage. It is in nine parts, expressing phases of the experiences between husband and wife : Anxiety, Apprehension, Expostulation, Resignation, Self-Sacrifice, Self-denial, Despair, Reflection, Change.

The wife notices the irrevocable process of change in Nature. Must this relation between her and her husband change too? The chill of autumn has made her anxious. As they sit by the fireside, she reflects that it is supplied with wood from a wreck. Does life mean shipwreck too? She is fearful of the future : she sees the coming of winter—the bare trees, the flight of the swallows ; she shrinks from it, but takes heart from the material aids they have to minister to their comfort. They have much, but heart chill, soul hunger, is theirs. She will live her life boldly, worthily.

A storm bursts. The wife apprehends the failure of the husband ; he is weak. She had expected so much from him ; he was but dead earth ; his soul had never transfigured to her. She could but love and watch, and the loving and watching were hateful to him ; she irked him now.

Summer comes. She watches a rock left bare by the tide : they symbolise her position. She sees a gay, blithe creature—a grasshopper—spring in the turf, and a blue and red butterfly settle in the rock. The omens brighten her faith that love may alight so on minds dead and bare : so could her love brighten her husband’s dead soul.

She is reading poetry under a cliff—some lines to the wind which ask if the wind is entrusting its cause to him as a winged thing. She cannot understand, and thinks how little this poet knows of the mystery of life, asking

his question of the wind. The moaning wind but means change to her; she sees in the message of the wind the hurling "from change to change unceasingly"—that nothing endures. It is life's part—perhaps its probation; but man might grasp "one fair good thing"—the love of a loving woman.

They are on the rocks. She philosophises on the earth's warm joys: she will make the low earth nature better by her love tides. What, is love to love only what is worth our love?

She is absorbed in art; she has learned from it the beauty of the hand. She praises God for this. She sees a world of wonder open up. She is dissatisfied with her attempts: it is the hand of a great past artist, Leonardo da Vinci—this cannot be reproduced. She turns to study the peasant girl, her model for her work. She sees the wonder of the flesh and blood, though but the rough, coarse hand of a peasant girl: better the live hand than the cast of the dead one. She sees that her past craving for line is impossible; for dead perfection she cannot reach is wasting her life: she will up and do, not dream and sigh.

She leaves her husband. He has ceased to admire her; she will set him free. She was harsh, ill-favoured, but love would have made her beautiful. Some day he may see, his eyes may open, his soul liberate to the knowledge of her.

Two poems recalling early friendship are in "Dramatis Personæ." "May and Death" is a little poem in commemoration of his cousin, James Silverthorne. The name of Charles was substituted for James, as the habit of Browning was to cloak the personal application. Mrs. Silverthorne was an aunt on his mother's side, who gave the thirty pounds for the publication of "Pauline." It is a characteristic record of grateful remembrance of those

early friendships. Although not published till 1864 in “*Dramatis Personæ*,” it was written to help *Hood’s Magazine* in 1857.

It characteristically subordinates his private feelings at the death of his cousin. He could wish all the delights of spring and the beauty of May weather gone too, but only asks that those who came after might spare this flower :

“ A certain wood
Might miss the plant; their loss were small :
But I,—whene’er the leaf grows there,
Its drop comes from my heart, that’s all.”

“*Caliban upon Setebos*” is a poem referring back to the Bible for its keynote. The monologue of Caliban in Browning’s poem yields the little more that gives his poetry the added world. The Caliban of Shakespeare is a Moron, a child in intellect but of mature body; the Caliban of Browning is no child in intellect—it represents the spiritual Moron, the undeveloped, the ungrown-up, the arrested development of the soul. The Caliban of Shakespeare is primitive, undeveloped human mind : that of Browning the subtle exhibition of a similar want of development in the higher regions of soul. Following Caliban on Setebos, Browning places his great beings, Rabbi Ben Ezra and Abt Vogler, as Shakespeare places Caliban in sharp juxtaposition to Prospero; one, the simple, the elementary, with reactions childish, elementary, controlled by the other with his riches of mind and his winged Ariel, to do his will and carry his messages, and execute his judgments, and prosecute his purposes with others : that airy sprite the right hand of genius owns.

In his Caliban Browning takes Shakespeare as mould, and adds his own superstructure, as he did to all models. His Caliban was not the simple Moron of Shakespeare : he had powers of observation, induction, and mental force; could turn his faculties upon themselves and reason from them; and from Shakespeare’s Caliban—a

real Moron—Browning drew a picture of the spiritual Moron in all its primitive limitation of soul.

Caliban here also soliloquises in the third person—the elementary infantine before it knows itself as “I”; the use of the pronoun so conveys Browning’s indication of its infantine mind. Caliban is but emerged from the slime himself; he has thoughts that his dam had put into him. She told him of Setebos—some outer being. From his reasoning Caliban thinks it a poor world. Why was it made? Out of spite, he thinks. Setebos likes to mock the creatures he has made: he is master, is capricious—yet he does not use his power. Why? Caliban suspects that Setebos has a master too, as he has: his mother says the master of Setebos is the Quiet, who is responsible for it all and vexes Setebos as Setebos vexes those beneath him. He is dangerous, is Setebos; he has to be kept pleased; he crushes things for mere caprice. Caliban sees no way out of his tyranny but by death; but his dam says that she does not think it is an end of trouble—and Setebos had better be placated, and thoughts about him had better be concealed. Caliban thinks Setebos is just like himself, and the Quiet may be the real master: “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself,” is the key to the poem (Ps. 1. 21).

“The poem ‘Rabbi Ben Ezra’ is formed on the historical Rabbi of the Middle Ages, Abenezr or Ibn Ezra, distinguished as a philosopher, an astronomer, a physician, and a poet, but especially as a grammarian and commentator. His best-known works are Commentaries on the Old Testament. He was the first who raised Biblical exegesis to the rank of a science. In addition to his Commentaries, he wrote treatises on Astronomy or Astrology, and a number of grammatical works.”—*Berdoe*, “*Browning Cyclopædia*.”

The poem “Rabbi Ben Ezra” reviews life from the thought of a Jewish scholar. It draws upon the Old Testament, uses its words and utters its promises, builds

on its similes and forms itself on its inspirations. Browning's love of the Bible, though not equal to the medieval Rabbi's, was deep, and to assume the cloak of a Jewish Rabbi very simple. The essence of Jewish teaching, the soul and God's dealing with it, was the keynote of Browning as of the erudite Rabbi.

The addition to his avowed theme, that of the old dispensation expressed in the title, is here concretely and specifically defined, as it is transcendently and elusively indicated in other poems, beginning with “Sordello”—the thrall to Christ, the service of the Master, the second power in his thought added to the first power of the Jewish faith: Christ, the Master of the Feast, completing Jehovah on the heights and the new wine's foaming flow of the ineffable cup are Browning's—the Christian mystical faith.

“Rabbi Ben Ezra” is character in the crucible of God's will, with the faith and mystic passion of Christianity added to Jewish intuition—a lofty moral ideal, the risen Christ emerging from the tables of the law of Moses—the mystic “I am that I am” again spoken from the burning bush. After God and the soul, the soul and Christ; after morality, spirituality; after God consciousness, Christ consciousness. After the learned Rabbi has his say, the Messianic intuition of the young David springs from the ground to the air, the resurrection and ascension, are added to old Rabbi Ben Ezra's philosophy:

“Look not thou down but up
To uses of the Cup.”

Upon the monologue of the old Jewish Rabbi, that condensation of the great truths of the old dispensation, Browning grafts that note of the new—the Christian uplift of soul to the Founder of Christianity, that cause from the One to the Two—Power and Love, those truths of his own soul which were the secret springs of his genius. The Jewish passion of the old dispensation, those verities and

rocks that Christianity rises upon, here submerge and minister to the giving of the Founder of Christianity :

“Thou, heaven’s consummate cup, what need’st thou with earth’s wheel?”

The poetic philosophy of “Abt Vogler” and “Rabbi Ben Ezra”—those heresies to the temper of the scientific-agnostic-atheistic domination—the poet could but assert, and go his way with his assertions of God and Soul and the saving grace of spirit.

“Now, who shall arbitrate?” says Rabbi Ben Ezra.

“Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise,
They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?”

* * * * *

“What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i’ the scale.”

And out of the march and rhythm of this great poem comes the jolt to the supine soul:

“Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?”

In the poem “Rabbi Ben Ezra” the truths of Judaism are packed into soul-convincing words. Browning knew the Bible as old Rabbi Ben Ezra knew it, and loved the imperishable wealth of the records of Israel’s call and selection from among the nations to be the children of God’s agency of operation in the world.

The early part of the poem contains almost literal presentation of the old testimonies to God’s will to man—the old and ever new problem of human life—its duties, purposes, and ultimate place in the ages beyond the present.

Browning’s reverence for, and knowledge of, the Bible

is common testimony of all his biographers. From the Bible the greatest productions of his art were drawn. The poem "Rabbi Ben Ezra" is a deep probing for truth of life and the hereafter; a clear and faithful rendering of God's truth as given to the Jews, passed through the alembic of his imagination. The poem uses the similes and metaphors of the Old Testament, its substance and fibre for this reasoned exposition of the purpose of God for man. Out of the whirl of life and nature, out of the individual stress and conflict with its environment, soul finds its means of developing its being. Love, and even hate, are challenges to soul to try it, and test it, and turn it forth sufficiently impressed :

" He fixed thee midst this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest :
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed."

But upon the Rabbinical truths the poem grafts the Christian truths. Here, as in so many of his poems, Browning breaks away from his model and reaches out beyond it. Upon the Jewish point of view of the Rabbi that God is Jehovah, the poem presents the Christian faith that God is Father, is Christ—graft of Love in Power, worship and fatherhood, this special creation of new from old by means of other than life's revolving wheel. For man's soul the Cup and the wheel, to evolve his worth for God :

" All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped."

In this poem of high purpose are words to conjure with intellectually and spiritually, are truths that work, are faiths that project. Here all the first principles of Browning's faith are packed : that opposition is soul's

salvation—that every individual stress of mind or soul is challenge to mind and soul to new conceptions of truth ; that every circumstance playing on man is challenge to him to give up his best ; that around his soul a perpetual dance of circumstance plays to try, and test it, and arm it for its next stage ; that it is out of great crises of emotion man comes upon truth ; that life is man's one chance of bringing his soul to birth ; that it is a testing ground, its prime business to develop the “ wings that sleep in the worm, they say.”

The poem “ Abt Vogler ” has for its mould the old Abbé Vogler, an organist and composer, born at Würzburg, June 15, 1879. He was designed for the Church, being of Catholic stock. He had marked musical talents ; at ten years of age could play organ and violin. He was ordained priest and appointed Chamberlain to the Pope. His musical compositions were successful, and he resigned from the Pope's service, and was considered to have failed, and was severely handled by the critics. He then travelled extensively, and was appointed Kapellmeister to the King of Sweden ; he became famous by the invention of an instrument called the orchestrion. With this he went to London, realised considerable sums of money, and made his name as an organist. He was supposed to have introduced pedal-playing to England. He returned to Germany with his distinctions, formed another school of music, and had a large following of students who felt deep affection towards him. He was tireless in his art, of genial disposition, agreeable to all ; his life was devoted to music.

Abt Vogler thinks music the highest of all arts, says the poem : it can lift to ecstasy ; it can assist the spiritual untrammelled, can mingle the soul with heaven's rapture and bring back the wonderful dead to live in an old world worth their new. Music is unmaterial ; it suggests the

continuity of heaven with earth. The evil of life is but as the silence of music that implies sound. On earth are the broken arcs, in heaven the perfect round : there the ideal rounds to completed life.

But the transcendental moment necessarily passes ; the soul tumbles back to the common chord. In this safe security life may pass in humbler consolations, but the moment of vision is never forgotten, and the musician is patient and proud and acquiescent to humbler themes. After the heights he has descended from, the common chord is restful, and he can now afford to sleep. In the common chord, with its rudiments of all music, the poet finds the medium of rest.

By the “ Name ” that “ Solomon willed,” reference is to the seal with the name of God engraved upon it which was supposed to give him power over demons of the air to do his bidding, and lordship with spirit denizens of Nature. At the ineffable name of God, says the poem, all the spirits rushed to his service : demons and angels, all conspired to build him a palace—demons with a blind plunge down to hell :

“ Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.”

And up and up went the airy ones—illuminating his structure as the pinnacled glory of St. Peter’s can arise, and all conspiring, and illuminating :

“ Raising my rampired walls of gold as transparent as glass.”

In the poem of “ Abt Vogler ” imagination and its airy sprites are proudly shown in action. Give me any common theme, and by certain laws of my being I lift it to new rhythm and meaning, new combinations of ideas with new deep meanings. Out of the old facts all about the world something within me emerges and lifts to profounder realisations the truths my faculty grasp, says the poet :

"Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:
And, there! Ye have heard and seen
Consider and bow the head."

By my gift of imagination, says Abt Vogler, I produce new effects; I put together old materials; I associate thought. My principle of association, he says, is dual—with two in my thought I work my wonder: this my secret of my productivity—working upon stored material gathered from the common loud and soft of life.

Powers of thought, say psychologists now, are productive agencies, and, backed by emotion, can accomplish anything—a deed of darkness or a deed of light, according to the seed of thought it works on with the imaginative will. That old power of the witch to harm was real power, and that the curse imaginatively given is machinery of mentality destructive to both giver and receiver, is commonplace of the "new thought" of the day—that powers of thought expended for the welfare of another return reinforced, multiplied, uplifted; that bread cast on the waters does return after many days; that what we sincerely wish or will for another does by some deep law of mind return freighted with kindred forces to the willer.

In the poem "Abt Vogler" are truths poetically presented which will bear the test of time and eternity beyond; truths which psychology now presents as commonplaces, but which were in Browning's time far in advance of the thought of the day, although but Christian truths.

That "give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over," is no vain promise, no lure of the fowler, but veritable law of the forces of thought; and, like all properties of the brain's *terra incognita*, better known by its disease than its health. The power of the witch to harm, the terror of the evil eye, the curse that comes home to roost, were favourite properties and true agents of evil in the machinery of old religion and romance.

The power of thought and emotion is the babble of the

schools to-day. Psychology teaches that our wills are creative ; that the nervous system will grow to the way in which it is habitually exercised (Carpenter). Will-power is likened to electricity—it can set the brain matter in motion from its own centres ; and also that unless this current runs through the brain cells they shrink, atrophy, and cease to function : so prophesied Abt Vogler ; as present-day psychology :

“ All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist ;
 Not its semblance, but itself ; no beauty, nor good, nor
 power
 Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the
 melodist
 When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
 The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too
 hard,
 The passion that left the earth to lose itself in the sky,
 Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard ;
 Enough that he heard it once : we shall hear it by-and-
 by.”

Psychology now asserts that whatever the will decides to do, if heated by emotion, the will can bring to pass : that whatever idea the mind is capable of conceiving, the mind is capable of achieving. This power is now imputed physiologically to the nervous system : that of being able to set up growth in the direction of its continuous and unremitting effort ; that brain matter itself seems to have a power of choice, which knows how to second the will when it would create new paths for its energies ; that the brain may function to new and previously unknown paths by the overpowering emotions of love and hate, by an ideal of either held before the mind. Do your part by willing, says psychology now ; point the direction you would go by centring force upon an idea, and the unconscious processes of nervous matter of the brain will do the rest by the crowning force of will, pointed by an ideal, backed by persistent emotion and mental effort. “ That monster custom,” says the genius of Shakespeare, is angel yet in this :

"That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock of livery
That aptly is put on."

"Assume a virtue if you have it not," says Hamlet,
"For use almost can change the stamp of nature."

"Thence comes it that my name receives a brand;
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand."

Sonnet CXI.

Imagination is the overlord of human life, and wonder of all kinds its feeder, its joy, its builder, its all-conquering power, born of the heavens and the earth, creature of air and flesh, child of vision and performance; its efforts never satisfying, never the perfect whole of its dreams, the pride of its sight never quite attained:

"In sight? Not half! for it seemed it was certain to match
man's birth,
Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse as I;
And the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to
reach the earth,
As the earth had done her best, in my passion, to scale
the sky;
Novel splendours burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with
mine,
Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering
star;
Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor
pine,
For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more
near nor far."

Persevere along the right lines of emotion, says this great transcendental poem, and by some complex imaginative act new forces begin to work, new powers come into play, new energies are grasped, new currents draw, new avenues open, new tracks through the blue are discerned.

Browning alone of poets disclaimed the mystic pose. He was no Stylites on his pillar, did not wrap his poet cloak about him in lofty aloofness as a being set apart. He alone of poets came down from the heights and mingled

freely with the crowd. He alone declares that the joy of the few should be the joy of the many; that imagination should work for all; that a butcher should paint, a baker rhyme, that another “haply mute should blow out his brains upon the flute”:

“Who asked at home that the whole race
Might add the spirit to be body’s grace
And all be dizen’d out as chiefs and bards”;

Sordello, Book III.

that all should know:

“The sudden element that changes things,
That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand,
And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust.”

Epistle of Karshish, the Arab Physician.

The crowning idea of Browning’s art is persistent presentment of continuity, of a something ever arising, as a harmony out of musical sound, as in “Abt Vogler”; as some great conception of spiritual control, as in “Rabbi Ben Ezra.” Imagination can only put together old materials in more powerful combination through the fusing power of its heat and origin in finer elements of processes of being: imagination raises to new modes of motion, to further modes of operation: the imagination can only finish what the elements of experience pass on to it—by refined nervous action perhaps, says Browning, as “nerve refines to spirit use” (“Christmas Eve”).

“Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear.
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and
 woe:
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome: ’tis we musicians
 know.”

Abt Vogler.

Logical and infinite laws of poetry are in “Abt Vogler” and “Rabbi Ben Ezra”: “The principal end of poetry

is to inform men in the just reason of living" (Ben Jonson).

The poem "Gold Hair" embodies a legend of Pornic. A young girl with beautiful golden hair belied her reputation for holiness, and time disclosed her as miser. Her hoarded gold she concealed under her masses of gold hair, ordering it not to be touched after her death. Time crumbled her tomb; the gold came to light during repairs. The power of gold, says the poem, is unable to pass heaven's doors. The avarice of the human heart discounted the fairness of the beautiful girl, who seemed too good for earth with—

"A soul that is meant (her parents said)
To just see earth, and hardly be seen,
And blossom in heaven instead."

Browning's fancy plays in this as in other poems round "her great gold hair":

"Hair, such a wonder of flix and floss,
Freshness and fragrance—floods of it, too!
Gold, did I say? Nay, gold's mere dross:
Here, Life smiled, 'Think what I meant to do!'
And Love sighed, 'Fancy my loss!'"

And the thought that rises out of the legend, says the poet, is that lust of material power, attempt to use both God and Mammon, is corruption:

"Evil or good may be better or worse
In the human heart, but the mixture of each
Is a marvel and a curse."

For his part, despite the essayists and reviewers, he finds the Christian faith true:

"'Tis the faith that launched point-blank her dart
At the head of a lie—taught Original Sin,
The Corruption of Man's Heart."

“A Death in the Desert” is the long soliloquy of John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, who was permitted to take charge of the Mother of Jesus by his expressed wish, as He died on the Cross. “Son, behold thy mother : mother, behold thy son.” From that moment John disappears from the scene of the disciples’ preaching of Christ : he is lost with this charge of love to Mary, and only reappears later as the writer and recorder.

The Gospel of St. John was Browning’s favourite Gospel. He draws upon it again and again, from its mysticism to its practical advice thrown at Gigadibs, the young freethinker bearding the lion of the Church. In final fling the great Churchman makes remark about the unsuccessful Gigadibs : he hopes he has studied his last Chapter of St. John.

John the Beloved is pictured as at the end of his long, hard-driven life. He has fled from persecution, but is unable to go on. The sorrowing little band of disciples turn aside with him that he may die in peace, secure from pursuit of persecutors of the Christians. He rouses to give his last words : his testimony to the reality of Jesus. He is the only one left who personally knew the Master : he will place on record what

“He saw and heard and could remember well.
There are some who will even say of him,
‘Was John at all, and did he say he saw?’”

In long dying breath John traverses the story of Jesus, of Whom he had written, “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” Christ’s life and death were not hearsay only to him : he had seen Him personally, had lain on His breast, and yet it is written of him, he knows : “He turned and fled.”

John traverses the Christian traditions—the tumult of the betrayal and death on the Cross, that defection of his in momentary panic, his faithful watch with the women at the foot of the Cross in the end.

All the salient points of John's intimacy of service and simple faith are traversed in the poem, their lessons expounded, the parables opened; the inner light of the mystic and saint floods the little band. The aged disciple rises to formulate his faith that the acknowledgment of God in Christ accepted by thy reason—

“Solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it,
And has so far advanced thee to be wise.”

In “A Death in the Desert” the circumstances of that Life—that Death—are presented as from an eye-witness.

The “Epilogue” to “*Dramatis Personæ*” presents three speakers: David, with his mystical faith added to Jewish faith: Renan, the author of the “*Life of Jesus*,” disturber of the Christian faith in the authenticity of Christ and the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel; Renan, the critic of Christianity, whose words Browning uses and answers in his own person as the third speaker. After presenting the point of view of David and Renan, we are invited to look at this question of Christ through his eyes. He flings back the words of Renan; he illustrates the play of the Divine round the human soul, as the rock-point in the sea attracts the swirl of the currents around, and after expending themselves on this point sweep on to find another peak to break upon: so do spiritual currents whirl about the soul and, having worked their purpose, leave it to its own resources. Natural forces do their work: the old Temple service of David did its emotive work; John did his work of testimony; Renan sends out his words subversive of this Christ ideal. Renan thinks he has decomposed Christ, but says Browning to Renan's view of Jesus: “This is my conception”:

“That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels and knows.”

Just when Christ recaptured the devotion of the poet we can but divine.

On June 14, 1866, the father of Browning died, within three weeks of completing his eighty-fifth year. His sister was henceforth his housekeeper and companion.

“So passed away,” wrote Browning to Miss Blagden, “this good, unworldly, kind-hearted, religious man, whose powers, natural and acquired, would so easily have made him a notable man, had he known what vanity or ambition or the love of money or social influence meant. . . . My sister will come and live with me henceforth; all her life has been spent in caring for my mother, and seventeen years after that, my father. You may be sure she does not rave and rend hair like people who have plenty to atone for in the past; but she loses very much.”

CHAPTER VI

"THE RING AND THE BOOK"

Materials of the poem—Celebrated Italian murder trial—Old book of the murder case found by Browning—Poem reviews course of trial from various points of view—Passion for truth was Browning's impelling motive—Defence of innocence—Truth's fight against a lie—Browning's confession of method of his art—Defiance of public opinion—Creative rapture—Philosophy in the welter of life—Poem conceived in Florence during life of his wife—Work of writing it at Warwick Crescent after her death—Dedication to the memory of Mrs. Browning.

IN 1868-69 was published "The Ring and the Book," in four volumes.

The poem "The Ring and the Book" tells its own history. The finding of the old yellow book, the walk home, the mastering of the story—time, place, emotion, are recorded: the ecstasy of creative rage, that intoxication as imagination seized its facts and the live soul fused them, and the result was:

"The life in me abolished the death of things,
Deep calling to deep."

Spirit laughed and leaped through every limb, lighted the eye, breathed power, bestowed life upon the past, and made it live again:

"How title I the dead alive once more."

This memorable poem belonged to Florence; the place of conception was Casa Guidi Terrace; his "lyric love" was with him. The writing of it all out, solaced and combated

the loneliness of that widowed life—for shortly after that rapturous June night Mrs. Browning died :

“Thence bit by bit I dug
The lingot truth, that memorable day,
Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold,
Yes; but from something else surpassing that
Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
Made it bear hammer and be firm to file.
Fancy with fact is just one fact the more.”

* * * * *

“There’s nothing in nor out o’ the world
Good except truth; yet this, the something else—
What’s this, then, which proves good yet seems untrue?
This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine
That quickened, made the inertness malleable
O’ the gold, was not mine—what’s your name for this?”

The poem “The Ring and the Book” is dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Browning; it carries that scroll to her memory and spiritual presence graved in the ring :

“O lyric Love, half angel and half bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face,
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue
And bared them of the glory—to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer and to die,—
This is the same voice: Can thy soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand—
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,

Their utmost up and on—so blessing back
 In those thy realm of help, that heaven thy home
 Some whiteness which I judge, thy face makes proud
 Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!"

During the first years of his widowed life at Warwick Crescent, Browning sought solace and forgetfulness in recalling that old inspiration, that tracking down of truth in the old Roman story. Amid all that bias of personal interest, of collective gossip; amid those varying points of view, that welter of human life; amid biassed self-interest, and the turmoil of ignorant, irresponsible public comment and gossip, truth must lie. To search for truth, to make that truth live again as a further truth through the creative imagination, to build another truth out of the common materials of the human story, is the artist's compulsion—to build for truth another truth:

"Able to take its own part as truth should,
 Sufficient, self-sustaining."

With the aid of the divinity of imagination there shall be made to live again this story:

"Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
 Made it bear hammer and be firm to file.
 Fancy with fact is just one fact the more."

"Truth, truth that's the gold! and all the good
 I find in fancy is, it serves to set
 Gold's inmost glint free."

Two Poets of Croisic.

In "The Ring and the Book" Browning definitely stated his faith in himself as instrument in the hands of a higher power. It was a "Hand" ever at his shoulder, he writes, which pushed him to the finding of the old yellow book; and to perpetuate the heroic in human story, set the task for him: search for truth, prime urge in the task of genius, strung his lyre.

This poem illustrates Mr. Gosse's assertion in his "Personalities of Robert Browning," where he commented on the

marvel of his creative speed: “In a flash,” he says, “Browning saw the bearing of a story, or an incident on his own problem.” “Italy was my University,” Browning confessed to Professor Corson.

Browning’s scholarship was extensive and vital, says Professor Corson, having what must have been Shakespeare’s power of acquiring and absorbing knowledge of all kinds. He illustrates this by a survey of what struck him in the poet’s sure knowledge of all the Latin materials of “The Ring and the Book”—the point of view of the paid advocates of the law, the remoulding of all with its environment of Roman society into English; but for a brief period Browning had turned his intention to law as alternative to unremunerative poetry.

This old book related the story of “A Roman Murder” case;

“Position of the entire criminal cause of Guido Franceschini, nobleman, with certain ‘Four’ the cut-throats in his pay.”

Count Guido and his four cut-throats are on trial for the murder of Pompilia, Count Guido’s wife. The other actors in the great scene—

“At Rome on February Twenty-two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety-eight”—

are: Giuseppe Caponsacchi, the chivalrous young priest who helped Pompilia escape from her husband; the Pope, who in the end has to review the whole case in appeal from the Court’s decision, as Guido Franceschini is a priest: there is the united voice of half Rome against the wife, the voice of the other Half-Rome against the husband: the voices of the two counsel engaged—Dominus Hyacinthus De Archangelis, counsel for the husband, and Juris-Doctor Johannes-Baptiste Bottinus, the public prosecutor: there is also Tertium Quid, the neutral party of criticism of the story, indifferent, without self-interest

to lead to taking a side ; and around it all the irresponsible chatter and point of view of ignorant lookers-on at life's tragedies.

The great speeches are the defence of Pompilia and his action by Caponsacchi, the monologue of the dying Pompilia, and the great monologue of the Pope on the crucial question of the trial, as Guido has claimed benefit of clergy. His verdict is against him ; he is proud to declare Pompilia " perfect in whiteness," and the warrior priest Caponsacchi atones for the defaulting priest Guido. The aged Pope grieves over the sordid story he has to fish about in for the truth : how find truth from the special pleading of the spokesman of the law on either side ? He can place no reliance on his own officers of Christian service—all failed Pompilia at her need ; the women of this convent she fled to, had failed their profession. It all terrifies the Pope, this deflection from the Christian ideal.

As Vicar of Christ he must hold the scales of justice true. In long monologue he has led thought up through the great past of the Church ; he sees Guido and his four companions guilty. The sword of justice must cut the lives of the five off from life ; and as to their future fate all is dark. For Guido there is but one hope, that in the sudden stroke of death—

" Truth may be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see one instant, and be saved."

The last secrets are only given up to Love, said Browning in " Christmas Eve " ; and Love as the solvent of pain—Love as the dissolver of sin and disease, of all the discords of life—is the working hypothesis ever displayed as truth by Browning. It was Love—the finest, subtlest agent of soul—the poet displays in action in this long work of art : Love and its unifying power, and the creative magic of Love's rage in Art's truth, shaped and sustained by the creative and directive force of high imagination to bestow immortal life upon its creations.

In this poem Browning touches the hand of Shelley again in electric sympathy with his tragedy of the "Cenci." In Shelley's impassioned defence of Beatrice Cenci, Browning's plea for the purity of Pompilia—in the tragedies of medieval Italy the poets link hands.

In the long traversing of the welter of life of the Italy of long ago, the working principle, the prime urge of Browning's soul, the purpose of his art from first to last, is displayed—the soul's urge for truth is Art's reason of being, and Love is the password to its domain, the key to eternal life :

" For life with all it yields
Of joy, and woe, and hope, and fear,
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,—
How life might be, hath been indeed, and is."

" It is the glory and the good of art," the poet writes, concluding " The Ring and the Book " :

" That art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.
How look a brother in the face and say,
' Thy right is wrong: eyes hast thou, yet art blind.
Thine ears are stuffed and stopped despite their length?
And oh! the foolishness thou countest faith!
But art—wherein man nowise speaks to men,
Only to mankind—art may tell a truth
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

* * * * *

It lives,
If precious be the soul of man to man."

" If the rough ore be rounded to a ring,
Render all duty which good ring should do,
And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship,—
Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,
Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)
Linking our England to his Italy."

The Ring and the Book (concluding lines).

Sir John Morley, in his Essay on "The Ring and the Book," says :

"The whole poem is a parable of the feeble and half-hopeless struggle which truth has to make against the ways of the world."

In "The Ring and the Book" is placed Browning's reasoned philosophy :

"Mind is not matter nor from matter, but above,—
 Leave the inferior minds and look at man!
 Conjecture of the worker by the work:
 Is there strength there? enough; intelligence?
 Ample: but goodness in a like degree?
 Not to the human eye in the present state,
 An isoscele deficient in the base.
 What lacks, then, of perfection fit for God
 But just the instance which this tale supplies
 Of Love without a limit. . . .
 Beyond the tale, I reach into the dark,
 Feel what I cannot see, and still faith stands!
 I can believe, this dread machinery
 Of sin and sorrow would confound me else
 Devised—all pain, at most expenditure
 Of pain by Who devised pain,—to evolve,
 By new machinery, in counterpart,
 The moral qualities of man—how else?
 To make him love in turn, and be beloved,
 Creative and self-sacrificing too,
 And thus eventually God-like."

The Ring and the Book: The Pope. (Book X.)

"Between Thee and ourselves—nay even again,
 Below us, to the extreme of the minute
 Appreciable by how many and what diverse
 Modes of the life Thou madest be! (Why live
 Except for love,—how love unless they know?)
 Each of them, only filling to the edge,
 Insect or angel, his just length and breadth,
 Due facet of reflection,—full no less,
 Angel or insect, as Thou framedst things."

Ibid.: The Pope. (Book X.)

"To our last resource, then! Since all flesh is weak,
 Bind weaknesses together, we get strength:
 The individual weighed, found wanting, try

Some institution, honest artifice
Whereby the units grow compact and firm!
Each props the other, and so stand is made
By our embodied cowards that grow brave.”

Ibid.: The Pope. (Book X.)

“So my heart be struck
What care I,—by God’s gloved hand or the bar?”

“I have heard said
’Twas no good sign when in a limb diseased
All the pain suddenly departs,—as if
The guardian angel discontinued pain
Because the hope of cure was gone at last:
The limb shall not again exert itself,
It needs be pained no longer:
All pain must be to work some good in the end.”

Ibid.: Giuseppe Caponsacchi. (Book VI.)

“God ever mindful in all strife and strait,
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,
Till at the last He puts forth might and saves.”

Ibid.: Pompilia. (Book VII.)

“Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i’ the dark to rise by.”

Ibid. (Book VII.)

“Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestaled in triumph?”

Ibid.: The Pope. (Book X.)

“Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,
And rise with something of a rosy shame
Into immortal nakedness.”

Ibid.: Giuseppe Caponsacchi. (Book VI.)

“And thus I see him [Guido] slowly and surely edged
Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
Aspiring to be immortality,
As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance
Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down
Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth
Level of the outer place lapsed in the vale.”

Ibid.: Giuseppe Caponsacchi. (Book VI.)

"I, untouched by one adverse circumstance,
 Adopted virtue as my rule of life,
 Waived all reward, loved but for loving's sake,
 And, what my heart taught me, I taught the world."
Ibid.: The Pope. (Book X.)

"Correct the portrait by the living face."
Ibid.

"So did this old woe fade from memory.
 Till after, in the fulness of the days,
 I needs must find an ember yet unquenched,
 And, breathing, blow the spark to flame. It lives
 If precious be the soul of man to man."
The Book and the Ring.

For Guido, pronounces the Pope—for such there is no hope but by miracle :

"For the main criminal I have no hope
 Except in such a suddenness of fate.
 I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
 I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
 Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all:
 But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
 Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore
 Through her whole length of mountain visible:
 There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
 And like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
 So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
 And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
 You must know that a man gets drunk with truth
 Stagnant inside him."

Ibid. (Book VI.)

"You know this is not love—it is faith,
 The feeling that there's God, he reigns and rules
 Out of this low world."

Ibid. (Book VI.)

"Life is probation and the earth no goal
 But starting-point of man: compel him strive,
 Which means, in man, as good as reach the goal."
Ibid.: The Pope. (Book X.)

CHAPTER VII

“BALAUSTION’S ADVENTURE” — “PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU, SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY”—“ARISTOPHANES’ APOLOGY”—“AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS” — “THE INN ALBUM”

Studies in Greek poetry—Power of poetry to sustain the soul—Translation of the “Alcestis” of Euripides—Recital of the “Alcestis” to cheer fugitives from war and prisoners at Syracuse—Enthusiasm of Balaustion, a Greek girl, for poetry of Euripides—Arousing patriotism—Apologia of Aristophanes—Argument with Balaustion—Comic and tragic in Art—Compromise or revolution—Portraiture of Napoleon III.—Expediency—Conservation of political and social ideals—Review of ideals of French writers—Ideal of womanhood—Story of woman’s sacrifice for love.

IN 1871 was published the long poem “Balaustion’s Adventure, including a Transcript from Euripides.”

In the poem of “Balaustion’s Adventure,” Browning depicts the power of poetry and love of country to arouse action as Balaustion recites the poetry of the great Euripides to the captives of the war.

Poetry is power which—

“speaking to one sense, inspires the rest,
Pressing them all into its service.”

Balaustion’s Adventure.

Balaustion and her companions had fled from Rhodes. She had saved her fellow-fugitives from their fear and despair by reciting to them the great poetry of Euripides.

Blown out of their course, they approached the shores of Syracuse—the enemy country. There were captives of war at Syracuse, and the shipwrecked party were allowed

to land on condition that some one among them should recite the poetry of Euripides to them. So Balaustion is put forward and recites for the fainting spirits of the prisoners the story of Alkestis.

They crown her with pomegranate flowers—the name she took henceforth.

Balaustion pleads for love to her master's work :

“ If I, too, should try and speak at times,
Leading your love to where my love, perchance,
Climbed earlier, found a nest before you knew—
Why, bear with the poor climber, for love's sake ! ”

In “ Balaustion's Adventure ” Browning again utters the faith that through poetry the soul is liberated.

The “ Alcestis ” of Euripides is the story of the devotion of Alcestis, who sacrificed her life to save that of her husband : it was translated from the Greek by Browning.

The god Apollo has been banished from Olympus for an alleged misdemeanour, his banishment taking the form of servitude with King Admetus of Thessaly, and he requites it in return by finding one who is prepared to die for his friend. When Admetus lies ill, it is his wife Alcestis who elects to make the sacrifice. Hercules appears to claim shelter from his friend Admetus, who will not disclose the name of the one mourned, for hospitality's sake, and Hercules goes within to the guest-chamber and feasts sumptuously, whilst the final obsequies are being observed on the distant hillside. Before the mourners return, Hercules has ascertained that it is Alcestis who has died ; and ashamed of his gross conduct in the face of his host's calamity, he girds up his loins and fares forth to fight Death himself, though he perish in the encounter. But the valiant one does not perish. Tattered and spent, he returns, leading a veiled woman, for whom he craves shelter from Admetus. The King declines the office, remembering his oath of constancy to the dying Alcestis, when Hercules unveils the woman—Alcestis.

Among the English Colony at Rome in the mid-Victorian century were the Browning’s and Lord Leighton. The writing of the poem of “Balaustion’s Adventure” was no doubt tenderly associated with his wife’s memory, and in it Browning’s tribute is paid to Lord Leighton, who had designed the monument for Mrs. Browning’s last resting-place in the little cemetery at Florence.

Lord Leighton’s picture of Hercules wrestling with Death for the body of Alcestis was no doubt in Browning’s mind, and as he wrote the episode in the poem he pays his tribute to this painter friend of his :

“ I know, too, a great Kaunian painter, strong
As Herakles, though rosy with a robe
Of grace that softens down the sinewy strength;
And he has made a picture of it all.
I pronounce that piece
Worthy to set up in our Poikilé.”

In the lines to Hercules in “Balaustion’s Adventure” is Browning’s ideal, his ideal of the completed man :

“ Gladness be with thee, Helper of our world !
I think this is the authentic sign and seal
Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
And ~~more~~ glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
Into a rage to suffer for mankind,
And recommence at sorrow.”

The poem of “Balaustion’s Adventure” is dedicated to the Countess Cowper :

“ If I mention the simple truth : that this poem absolutely owes its existence to you,—who not only suggested, but imposed on me as a task, what has proved the most delightful of May-month amusements—I shall seem honest, indeed, but hardly prudent ; for how good and beautiful ought such a poem to be !

“ Euripides might fear little ; but I, also, have an interest in the performance ; and what wonder if I beg you to suffer that it make, in another and far easier sense, its nearest possible approach to those Greek qualities of goodness and beauty, by laying itself gratefully at your feet ?

“ R. B.

“ LONDON : *July 23, 1871.*”

The poem has for foreword Mrs. Browning's lines to Euripides :

“ Our Euripides, the human,
 With his droppings of warm tears,
 And his touches of things common
 Till they rose to touch the spheres.”

“ Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society ” was also published in 1871.

Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau is in outline the portraiture of Napoleon III. in 1871. In that year Napoleon III. bulked very largely in the public and political eye of England ; he was accounted a serious factor against the peace of Europe. The poem analyses the true underlying factors of progress—revolution or compromise—while retracking the main incidents of the Emperor's career from the time of his revolt from the Pope, with Italian revolutionaries : his banishment from France as a Royal pretender, and his life as refugee in England till he made his venture for the Imperial Crown in 1840, and his defeat and imprisonment, his escape and return to England.

After Louis Philippe died he offered himself to France again, but was again rebuffed, and settled in England, taking part in suppressing the revolutionary tide of the Chartist Riots.

Again he returned to France, and sought, and secured, election as Member of the Assembly ; from thence became President of France. He bided his time and made his *coup d'état*, succeeding in becoming Emperor. He pursued his successes, returning to his early dream of effecting the liberation of Italy in conjunction with Victor Emmanuel. He was controlled by clerical influence and hurried into war with Germany in 1870, this being considered the only hope of securing the permanency of his dynasty. The French were defeated at the Battle of Sedan, and with ninety thousand men Napoleon was made prisoner. He was imprisoned in Germany for a time, but

subsequently was permitted to live in exile in England. He lived at Chislehurst, dying there on January 9, 1873; his wife, the Empress Eugénie, survived him nearly fifty years, living in seclusion at Chislehurst. Their son, known as the Prince Imperial, gave his life fighting for the English in the Zulu War.

In the poem, “ Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society,” he is discussing himself with a woman. He analyses his plan of expediency, his conservative compromise, the motives in his past diversified life; illustrates his work as the day’s task of uniting one point to another. He never aimed to make anything new: his aim was to conserve and save elements he believed made for the stability of Society. He discusses the nature of God. God he conceived to be a subjective conception. The shopkeeper’s God is one thing: to him God is not what it is to the woman to whom he is talking. Hers is a material conception, the power that pays her way for her: his idea is on a large scale—one eye to his own interests, one to God’s. He understood God to wish him to conserve things, so he must preserve what he thinks is God’s will in conservation of order. He finds the already existing good, and builds upon that. It is only great inspired men who can radically change the nature of Society: if he is that now, his work will be recognised in time. All that shirks the question of God above he will not waste his time with. Fourier and Compté are impotencies, he thinks. He has endeavoured to hold the balance straight for twenty years, and reckons has done good service to humanity by leaving things more stable than he found them—that is his ambition. He is no innovator—he creates nothing, he but recreates and renews. His task is to co-operate, not revolutionise and change. He gets his white from black sometimes by the marvel of chemistry. Why want to create white direct? The world may be bad—he does not think a perfectly good one possible on this earth. In this question of saving Society—is there wisdom in it? Has he worked aright to

that end? He sees more hope than discouragement out of his work; he leaves what he finds, and stabilises what he found tottering. God alone can make great changes. He has but to tend the cornfield—to provide the bread for myriads of the hungry who ask only for bread. He could not turn aside from his tending of the cornfield to play with horticulture of other growth—Liberty, Philanthropy, Enlightenment, Patriotism—he was for the myriads who had no flag at all. He has to choose his work in the limited span allowed to man: if he had a hundred years to live he might specialise. He must put all into a cause—a flag, a faith. Time was when he was only a voice; he had great aims then. Has he failed to perform his ideals? He sees the order of evolution from jelly-fish to man—he, too, has been so evolved, and can sympathise with all classes. He sees man in want of meat: man cannot satisfy his hunger on Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason": and obstacles prove faith. It is not easy to effect the aim intended. He may seem a grotesque figure—he is like the man in cloudland. The silent truth fights its battle with the lie, but in the chamber of the soul. But words must be used, even though they deflect, as the best rifle will deflect a shot.

This poem is made difficult of understanding by the introduction of his listener, a woman of classic Greece. Laïs was a celebrated courtesan, who ridiculed the philosophers, so was a suitable listener to the story of Hohenstiel. There are other allusions requiring knowledge of Browning's thought at that time. "Home's stilts" refers to the phenomenon of levitation, attributed to Home as a spiritual gift, by irreverent criticism as some mechanical deception of the Medium.

The poem traverses a vast region of knowledge in the poet's mind: it seems but a fatiguing and puzzling piece of casuistic pleading to some in its theme of compromise, which is the question animating the poems of this period in Browning's art; it betrays his exercise of mind upon

the great question of compromise, and brackets in the abstract with “ *Fifine-at-the-Fair*.” He states his case in the simile of the statue of Laocöon, partly covered.

The foundation of the piece of statuary is covered—all that the figure strives with under this drapery has to be divined. Onlookers think the man is simply yawning and stretching, but really he was wrestling for two lives under the covering placed upon half the work of artistry.

He will now, after so much talk, give his hearer, the woman he is talking to, the sequel of it all : of what he might have been, if certain historians had the telling of it, he has outpoured in biographical fashion to Laïs, and the sequel is for Sagacity and Hohenstiel to argue further the question of compromise he has in bare disclosure revealed.

Sagacity preaches that heredity is everything, but Hohenstiel thinks it a lie ; that, in fact—

“ The great Gardener grafts the excellence on wildings as He will.”

The old Romans had tradition of a priestly succession, by which the new had to slay the old to obtain office. The rite of initiation was murder, in fact, under religious sanction. So it is with the priesthood of genius—one power has to slay the other : the new power slays the old, but handsomely.

But he breaks off his philosophising : his listener is asleep.

The man underneath, his motive, his endeavour, the soul under his action, the thought beneath the deed—that is what he asked for the actor here.

It is recorded in the Diary of Edwin Harrison, who was a fellow-guest, that “ Prince Hohenstiel ” was written at the rate of so many lines a day, neither more nor less, while staying at Little Milton, above Loch Tummel, in Scotland.

In 1875 appeared “ Aristophanes’ Apology, including a

Transcript from Euripides : being the Last Adventure of Balaustion."

"Aristophanes' Apology, including a Transcript from Euripides," is a further adventure of Balaustion. She has married Euthukles, the lover she found at Syracuse. She has met Euripides and has kissed his sacred hand, paid her homage, and received from him his tragedy of "Hercules."

The poet is dead. Athens has fallen : it is no longer the great Athens. She sets sail with her husband for Rhodes. As they voyage, she consoles herself with recalling her memories of Euripides : she recalls him, how unappreciated in life, but with statues to him after his death. She and Euthukles need nothing visible to remember him by—she has Herakles in her heart, she will recall it. She recalls to him how their reading was interrupted one night by a band of drunken revellers led by Aristophanes, the comic poet : she relates the incident of how she engaged in argument for love of Euripides, whom Athens derided as a dreamer, giving the crown to Aristophanes the practical. Aristophanes appearing at the head of his band of revellers, Balaustion engaged in battle of words with him, over the claim of Euripides for supremacy.

Aristophanes and his friends had braved these lovers of Euripides, who had not been present at the honour done to him. He would argue the question of the Comic or the Tragic poet—he would see the poem Euripides had given Balaustion. She says he is not worthy. He enters on his defence of his art : Comedy is freedom ; the comic art can punish without slaying. His game was not to change customs, play the demagogue, preach innovation ; he was spiteless, reaching through men to principles. He attacked sophistry, not Socrates. His feud with Euripides was that he bade them take life as we found it, not magnify its miseries. Euripides knew the name, but not the thing itself. Aristophanes knew the things themselves : gods, heroes, priests, legislators, poets—all these would have

lain in the dust, if Euripides had his way. Men were no longer heroes to Euripides—they were the ragged, sick, lame, halt, and blind, their language common. Euripides would first drag sky down to earth, and then lift earth to sky. Women, once mere puppets, must now match the male in thought and act—even the slave must be man’s mate. And there were no gods to Euripides : man was free, owns no laws but himself—so necessarily must be god. Euripides had no plain positive word of behaviour on earth : he triumphed, but rarely gained a prize.

But Aristophanes, with his comic weapon, closes with the enemy—minces no terms, declares what he believes truth. For his part, he accepts the old, contests the strange, misdoubts every new man, acknowledges all work already done in religion and laws :

“ Euripides began this flight of opinion :
Aristophanes has triumphed over him.
But let Balaustion speak for her master.”

Balaustion says she replies as mouse confronting a monarch of the forest. She has no fighting quality, but loves all things lovable. She has no art of criticism, but, faulty as it is, she will proceed. She sees no wit in buffoonery, no sense in filth.

“ You rebuke superstition, yet advocate peace ; support religion and lash irreverence. All innovation or change you attack—the oldest is the best. You claim the doctrines of Euripides, who sang them all before you—he had said his great say in your boyhood. You tickled the ear of the mob. You refuse to go to the roots of abuses. You lie about his writing, impute assistance from others, belittle his birth, and so chase your poet-rival out of court : all this in name of Comedy. The sophists, too—at least their disciples believe them.”

Euripides spoke to the future. Aristophanes demands better defence of her master. She recalls her last meeting with him. He gave her a play : she will read it—that is his best defence, as when Sophocles was declared to be of

unsound mind he recited his last play. Euripides gave her another play—his “*Herakles*”: “It gained no prize,” he said, “but take it—your love the prize.”

As Balaustion divined the genius of Euripides, she sees, too, the worth of Aristophanes. She sees in him the half-god, the practical idealist. Suddenly, too, she sees the worth of Aristophanes, because Balaustion’s woman intuition sees the god in him under the human :

“All at once, large-looming from his wave,
Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the ledge,
A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,
Divine with yearning after fellowship.
He rose but breast-high. So much god she saw;
So much she sees now, and does reverence.”

“*Aristophanes’ Apology*” ends in the note of sadness of *Sordello*.

“After the first hard years of his return to England from Italy,” writes Lady Ritchie, “a gentler day began to dawn. After the publication of ‘*Balaustion*’ in 1871, recognition, popularity, honorary degrees, tokens of appreciation which should have come sooner, began to crowd in upon ‘our great Commoner,’ as someone called Browning when Tennyson accepted a peerage. He went his own way through it all, cordially accepted the recognition, but chiefly avoided the dignities, and kept his two lives distinct. He had his public life and his own private life . . . constant alternate pulse of work and play.”

“‘You must spin your wool some day; every woman has wool to spin, some sort or another,’ was his reply to me under disappointment as authoress which I had confessed.

“I went home feeling quite impressed by the little speech. My blurred pages looked altogether different, somehow. It was spinning wool—it was not wasting one’s time, and one’s temper—it was something more than spoiling pens and paper,” wrote Lady Ritchie in her “*Robert and Elizabeth Browning*,” in her book “*Tennyson, Ruskin, and Browning*.”

In 1877 “*The Agamemnon of Æschylus*” was published. It is dedicated to Carlyle, Browning’s lifelong friend : to “dear and noble Carlyle.”

“The Agamemnon of Æschylus” is a transcription of the Greek play.

The preface by Browning announces that it is a literal translation, so literal that the Greek spelling and atmosphere make the poem difficult reading.

It is the tragedy of prophecy of the slow march of retribution—Cassandra as prophetess of gloom is property of English phrase. The story is to be found in the classical dictionaries; it is one of bloodshed, horror upon horror—that Greek spirit of tragedy, and the furies of disordered love and revenge; of treachery and cruelty; of incest and terrored evildoing, common to the annals of the legends of the gods.

Æschylus was born 525 B.C. He fought at Marathon and was distinguished for valour. He was fifty-three years of age when he gained the prize for his tragedy of “Agamemnon.” He was the first of the three great tragic poets of Greece. The poem is of war and revenge; old customs of sacrifice, and spoliation of women by the conqueror; lust of power; cruelty of the strong to the weak.

Browning draws forth the conditions of pagan times, in artistic representation. He shows the civilisation of the times when gods peopled the imagination as realities.

In 1875 also appeared “The Inn Album.”

“The original story was too repulsive to be adhered to in all its details: first the gambling lord producing the portrait of the lady he had seduced and abandoned, and offering his expected dupe, but real beater, an introduction to the lady as a bribe to induce him to wait for payment of the money he had won; secondly, the eager acceptance of the bribe by the younger gambler, and the suicide of the lady from horror at the base proposal of her old seducer. The story is in its main outlines that of Lord De Ros, once a friend of the great Duke of Wellington. The incident belongs to the thirties of the nineteenth century and was the sensation of the day.”—*Berdoo*, “*Browning Cyclopædia*.”

The sordid story is transmuted by Browning into noble romance by his introduction into it of the gambler's

opponent as an old lover of the lady. As he hears the old love story of the betrayal of a woman, he concludes from points of resemblance that it must be his own early love, who had refused him because of being vowed to another, who must have been this old lover. He hears for the first time of her fate—of her marriage to an obscure country parson in order to appease her wounded pride. But she had not told her story to the husband, and was then in the grip of her old seducer. This man was a scoundrel and woman-wrecker: he now hated his victim because she disdained him.

Later, two women occupy the parlour of the Inn, and the leaves of the Album are turned over again by the elder. The younger, who is the lady of the story, wife of the clergyman, is terror-stricken on seeing her old lover enter the room. She misinterprets the situation—she thinks he is still seeking to entrap her, and reproaches him bitterly. He in turn reproaches her, pretends she has ruined his life, declares he loves her still although she hates him. She repels him indignantly, calling forth his admiration and awaking the old love. He entreats her to return to him, kneels to her for belief in his love. She is repelling him with contempt when the young man enters. He misinterprets the situation in his turn—thinks that he has been entrapped by the elder man to some purpose. He denounces the trick, as he thinks it, when he meets the lady later: the man proposes to engage in the gambling scheme for possession of her. The poem rises into explanations between it; then the lady hears that she is the stake. In flash of mixed emotion the young man stabs the gambler as the woman appeals for help against the lie he has written in the Inn Album of her. She also writes in the Album that the deed of murder was done to save her from outrage. She dies as the other woman, betrothed to the young man, enters the room again.

This poem contains Browning's highest utterances upon womanhood and motherhood. To him womanhood meant motherhood.

CHAPTER VIII

“ *FIFINE-AT-THE-FAIR* ”

Poet's loneliness after wife's death—Lyrical lines to her memory—Heaven in poetry—Poem's keynote apparent inconstancy—Analogy of “ *Don Juan* ” for poem—Ideal love—Human love—Metaphysical dissertation on poet's compromise of Art to carry his ideal—Doubtful of public understanding—The mystic and the crowd—Poet not Stylites—Descends to meet humanity—Dual life—Mystical philosophy—Practical intellectualism—Soul slavery to service of race—Poet's penalty of misunderstanding for touching blot of social evil—Public misjudgment—Judgment of Dr. Dowden, biographer of Browning—Poem a chain of philosophic thought from humble basis to heights of speculation.

THE poem “ *Fifine-at-the-Fair* ” was published in 1872. It was written at Browning's home in Warwick Crescent, but reflects the thoughts and incidents of a previous summer's holiday in France. The picture of the householder in his lonely discomfort was faithful to the facts of the time : the half-querulous, half-humorous recital of his discomforts is placed in the Epilogue of the poem. In later life he returned to the social world when seclusion seemed disastrous to his health.

The climate of England did not suit him after Italy, says Mrs. Orr's *Biography of Browning* :

“ Each winter brought its searching attack of cold and cough ; each summer reduced him to the state of nervous prostration or physical apathy which rendered change imperative—his health and spirits rebounded at the first draught of foreign air. For many summers France was the holiday resort, till finally Italy and Asolo lapped him in their spell again.”

Of his new poem "Fifine-at-the-Fair" Browning wrote to his friend Domett in New Zealand :

"It is the most metaphysical and boldest I have written since 'Sordello.' I am very doubtful of its reception by the public."

"It was not without misgiving," says Mrs. Orr, "that Mr. Browning published 'Fifine-at-the-Fair'; but many years were to pass before he realised the kind of criticism to which it had exposed him. . . . The indifference to public opinion which had been engendered in him by its long neglect, made him slow to anticipate the results of external judgment."

In a letter to Professor Knight, Browning wrote :

"I daresay that, by long use, I don't feel or attempt to feel criticisms of this kind, as most people might. Remember that everybody this thirty years has given me their kick and gone their way."

"Fifine-at-the-Fair" is a long poem. It is his apologia for his choice of the poetic medium to enable his truth to effect its work in the world ; it is a long-drawn argument for his compromise of practical mysticism, displaying truth through the art which he had adopted. Here he stated his conviction that man, "the full-blown ingrate," can best be reached by subterfuge ; that truth might penetrate through dramatic presentment of it which, if projected naked, would be rejected ; that the rakish craft of dramatic art, Fifine, could slip her moorings easily, while the superior ship, Elvire, "refits in port" : a plea for compromise, half truth, the cloak of Art to shield the naked soul from coarse handling :

"For just unable to fly, we swim,"

says the Prologue to the poem, and Art's compromise is—

"With head aspire to truth ; with hands explore the false below."

The Prologue to the poem is addressed to the memory of his wife. He pictures her spirit, that early left its

sheath. Is he inconstant to the spirit above him because he loves life and finds heaven in his work? He cannot join her spirit's flight, nor she his in this life :

“ I never shall join its flight,
For nought buoys flesh in air;
If it touch the sea—good-night!
Death sure and swift waits there.

“ But sometimes when the weather
Is blue, and warm waves tempt
To free oneself of tether,
And try a life exempt

“ From worldly noise and dust,
In the sphere which overbrims
With passion and thought,—why, just
Unable to fly, one swims!

“ By passion and thought upborne,
One smiles to oneself—‘ They fare
Scarce better, they need not scorn
Our sea, who live in the air !’

“ Emancipate through passion
And thought, with sea for sky,
We substitute, in a fashion,
For heaven—poetry !”

“ *Fifine-at-the-Fair* ” is a poem of apparent inconstancy. Prologue and Epilogue present the two loves of his life : was he inconstant to his wife's memory because he loved life's way?—was he faithful to his soul's mistress in the wash of his art?

The quotation from “ *Don Juan* ” heading the poem of “ *Fifine-at-the-Fair* ” sent the reading public full cry, led by the critics, after Browning as a sensualist. The symbolism of *Fifine* for his art, his material method, and *Elvire* for his truth, his spiritual love, was unfortunate to minds unaware of ideal love, unyoked to an ideal task. *Fifine*, says the poem, is the fancy stuff, the illusion, through which *Elvire*, the ideal, has to clothe itself. He loves *Fifine* : he would like to disport irresponsibly with art at

times; but Elvire is unreasonable—she is his wife, he is wedded to Elvire—and she questions this trifling with Fifine as illicit.

The poem presents a fine contempt for critics and mankind. He contrasts the man and woman character to the disadvantage of man: women are symbolised in the story of the Dolphins. For himself, he is before his time, and must push his frail cockleshell Fifine between shoal and tide. The turn of the tide will come and others will arrive early in boatloads. So thanks he Fifine for what she does for him. It is hard to have to stifle soul in mediocrities, put on disguise so that the hunter may not seem superior to the herd: man lives amid play-acting, and success is the test of its worth. Light must have its time to break, but truth may be flashed in points. All's right in the end—waiting—death. He has a vision of the world: he is lonely, likes pity in this task of probing for reality; his philosophy is compromise—his work to make men look up in order to bring something supernatural to birth. Mere philosophy is impotent to bring forth this truth: there is some certainty in church-building—what about the philosophy of faith's ladder? The truth is that "all's change, but permanence as well"; and there is Christ, and the argument from the need or desire of a thing to the means provided to satisfy them as bodies—spiritual legs, perhaps, because of a desire to run, and now, tired of legs which walk, we bud wings to fly with. His truth is constant to Elvire, his art to Fifine. His problem is, from a given point evolve the Infinite. He would rejoin Elvire after his disport with Fifine in the wash of the wave of art.

Music ever transported him to these mystic regions of speculation. After seeing Fifine, the gypsy-girl, and the show he knows all about from boyhood's love of the gypsies, he sits down to improvise. It becomes the "Carnival of Venice," and he is transported by the mystery of music and memory to Venice, to view the crowd from St.

Mark's, and recall the lesson of right perspective for the seeing of men—not aloft in the solitary mystic's way, but down in the Square among them, where humanity comes into true view.

He has finished his long speculation, and sits weary and tired of his sustained intellectual flight; his disport with Fifine ceases, and Elvire keeps aloof. She is unreasoning and exacting, this soul wife of his, and grudges him his relief with sportive Fifine. He relates how the petty discomforts of the lonely householder press upon him when she is away; reality is misery without her inspiration :

“ ‘ Ah, but if you knew how time has dragged, days, nights!
All the neighbour-talk with man and maid—such men!
All the fuss and trouble of street-sounds, window-sights:
All the worry of flapping door and echoing roof; and then
All the fancies . . . Who were they had leave, dared try
Darker arts that almost struck despair in me?
If you knew but how I dwelt down here!’ quoth I:
‘ And was I so better off up there?’ quoth She.”

In “ *Fifine-at-the-Fair*,” Browning likens his art to that of Michael Angelo's half-finished marble :

“ You must know I too achieved Eidothée
In silence and by night—dared justify the lines
Plain to my soul.”

The poem of “ *Fifine-at-the-Fair* ” is in direct sequence to “ *Sordello* ”: to blend his ideal into workable stuff of art was still his problem. Man is a lordly stag, says “ *Fifine-at-the-Fair*,” and must be stalked warily; the soul in him must stifle under a mask of worldliness; imagination must fold its wings and keep close to the ground with the wingless. The stirrings of spirit, the intuitions of genius must cloak themselves in the commonplace and material that the crowd may understand. The general mind must be disarmed of its general jealousy of what is superior to it; by art that rises into the true out of the

false; by compromise, by apparent inconstancy to pure idealism, man's soul may be approached by the mystic : so the compromise of art—

“ To make you must be marred,—
 To raise your race must stoop, to teach them aught must learn
 Ignorance, meet half-way what most you hope to spurn
 I' the sequel. Change yourself, dissimulate the thought
 And vulgarise the word, and see the deed be brought
 To look like nothing done with any such intent.
 As teach men—though perchance it teach by accident!
 So may you master men: assured that if you show
 One point of mastery, departure from the low
 And level—head or heart revolt at long disguise,
 Immurement, stifling soul in mediocrities.
 If inadvertently a gesture, much more, word,
 Reveal the hunter no companion for the herd,
 His chance of capture's gone.”

Stanza 75.

Soul functioning is something apart from intellectual functioning, says Browning. “I have seen men grow old among their books and yet die case-hardened in their ignorance” (“Paracelsus”).

The work of the intellect is for this life, for material benefit, material gain, material advancement. Upon its accepted truths this life builds and prospers, develops from low to high, gains honour and reward according to intellectual energy and endowment. The work of the soul is otherwise, says Browning: it is deeply concerned with what is to follow this life—when soul-seeing synchronises with intellectual seeing, the genius, able to translate this further combination of forces to further combination of power, arises. It was to the possibility of this duality of being in man—the soul within the body—that Browning addressed poem after poem. His work was to be the messenger of good spiritual tidings to souls in dark places: to show the soul in action, to paint the mood and leave the co-operating fancy of the reader to do the rest, was his method of missionary enterprise. From the spiritual he

receives spiritual credit ; from the intellectual he receives intellectual hospitality ; from the general mind, criticism. But he does what he set out to do—gains an entrance by his art into human minds where dogmatic seeds of his truths would be unable to lodge.

In “ *Fifine-at-the-Fair* ” Browning confesses his design to touch the human soul through his art. He believed that the soul is responsive to artistic suggestion, where naked spiritual assertion would fall on stony ground. His poetry, he confesses in “ *Fifine-at-the-Fair*,” although apparently counterfeit presentment of truth, carries deeper freight : he believed that rakish art could play the missionary—would be admitted where pure spiritual truths would be unable to penetrate. To teach men he believed it necessary—

“ To see the deed be brought
To look like nothing done with any such intent.”

From this ideal his soul stretched, “ frenetic to be free,” at times. The sight of the losel irresponsible gypsies raised the old Sordello problem, the old memories and aspirations of that time, the old compulsion to Humanity’s service. Why should some feel Humanity’s call for service more than others ? he asks as he sees these care-free people, these unburdened people living for the day’s purposes in material joys. Why should others have to slight the day’s delight in vision of a hereafter ? And why should some have to live the life of the poet of *Fifine* ? And the mystic must not tell his spirit’s secrets—“ it is not lawful,” says St. Paul.

Indignation at the treatment of poor *Fifine* of the gypsy show sent his memory tracking back to the “ *Sordello* ” days, when he embraced the ideal of service to Humanity as his mistress. Knowing his love for right and justice, truth and love—remembering that ideal of service to Humanity from which at times his soul stretched, “ frenetic to be free,” he wondered what would be the result. Would the sight of the gypsies give him the

creative impetus? he wondered, as he pondered, too, why he should have to feel this service to the race that the losel gypsy was utterly unconscious of: why he was imaginatively bound to the service of the ideal:

“That bloodless, sexless sprite I call my queen?”

Indignation fired the train—indignation at the lot of poor Fifiene again set creative processes at work in sequence to the train of thought of Sordello. Again the old problem pressed: how to blend his ideal into workable stuff of life—how to serve mankind without appearing to do so dogmatically—by art to catch the soul of man and pass on invisible truths, seeds from the Almighty Hand.

“Not what man sees, but what God sees—the ideas of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand.”
—*Essay on Shelley*.

In the poem of “Fifiene-at-the-Fair” Browning rises to high ground, to the lofty love of the idealist, the Platonic love that is high placed in the region where passion is sexless. The artist, the poet, the patriot, the scientist, all know this mistress, “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”—that unreasoning “she intelligence of nature,” which sacrifices all in the way of its ends—that high love of an ideal, of an intellectual passion, of a mystic seeing soul wedded to its dream of perfection, of a spirit ever in upreach to its inspiration.

“In men of certain constitutions,” says Plato, “the generative power lies chiefly in their bodies. Such men turn to the other sex—this is the way in which they are enamoured—and procure to themselves, by begetting children, the preservation of their names, a remembrance of themselves which they hope will be immortal, a happiness to endure for ever. In men of another stamp, the faculties of generation lie in the spirit. For those there are who are more prolific in their souls than in their bodies; and are full of the seeds of such an offspring as it peculiarly belongs to the human soul to conceive and to generate. And what is this but wisdom and every other virtue? Of these are the poets and all artificers such as are related to have been

inventors. But by far the most excellent and beauteous part of wisdom is that which is conversant in the founding and well ordering of states and other settlements of men; a part of wisdom distinguished by the names Temperance and Justice. When the soul of any man has been teeming with the seeds of this wisdom from his youth (and of divine souls it is the native property thus to teem), as soon as he arrives at maturity of age he longs to sow them in the souls of others and thus to propagate wisdom. And he too, I suppose, looks about and searches for beauty, where he may generate, for never can he generate on aught that is ugly and vile. And then he cannot but arrive at the perception of beauty in institutions and laws, and all subjects of discipline and practice; and he comes to discover that all this beauty is of one kin, so that he will esteem bodily beauty but a small and insignificant part of it. And after institutions and practices he must proceed to the sciences, so that he may perceive the beauty of these too. And then, regarding the great extent of beauty which he now surveys, and being no longer, like a mean and illiberal slave, in subjection to one form only, some one human being or practice; but betaking himself to that wide sea of beauty and contemplating it, he will bring forth, in the unstinting fertility of wisdom, a multitude of high and noble discourses, and thoughts, until, having grown and waxed strong there, he perceives that one Science which is vast enough for a beauty so vast. Whoever has been thus far instructed in the things pertaining to Love, by contemplating the beautiful in a right succession and order, is now near the perfect intuition of his subject. For suddenly he will behold a marvellous thing, Beauty in its very essence—that vision, O Socrates, for the sake of which all our former labours and pains were undertaken. This beauty, in the first place, is from everlasting, and knows neither beginning nor ending, neither growth nor decay. Then it is not beautiful when looked at in one way and ugly in another, nor beautiful at one time and not so at another, nor beautiful in certain relations and situations and ugly in others, nor beautiful to some persons and ugly to other persons. Nor does it appear to any one as if it were such a thing as a face, nor has it hands or other bodily parts, nor is it some particular doctrine or science. Now to go on, or to be led by another, along the right way of love, is this: beginning from those lower manifestations of the beautiful to go on in a continual ascent, all the way proposing this highest beauty as an end, and using the rest but as so many steps in the ascent, to proceed from one to two and from two to all beautiful forms, and from the beauty of form to the

disciplines and practices, to the beauty of sciences; until at length from these sciences he attains that science which is the science of no other thing than the supreme Beauty; and thus finally learns to know what the very essence of Beauty is. . . .

"Universally all desire of things good, and all that longing after happiness, which is in every individual of human kind, is the mighty Deity of Love who by secret ways and strata-gems subdues and governs the hearts of all. . . .

" 'Well, then, Socrates,' said she—Diotima—'must we not acknowledge that all men are in love; seeing that the affections of them are always fixed on the same things? Or shall we say that some are in love and some are not?'

" 'It is a thought,' said I, 'which I confess surprises me.'

" 'Be not surprised,' said she; 'for the case is nothing more than this, that the name of love, which belongs to all love in general, we appropriate to one particular kind of love, singled out from the others, which we distinguish by other names.'

" 'To make me conceive your meaning more perfectly,' said I, 'cannot you produce some other case parallel to this?' Making or creating comprehends many kinds of operation. For all cause by which anything proceeds out of non-being into being is creation, so that all the operations and all the works executed through any of the arts, are indeed so many creations: and all the artists and the workmen are real creators, makers or poets."—*The Banquet*.

"The question of conjugal fidelity is as much the subject of 'Fifine-at-the-Fair' as the virtue of tar-water is the subject of Berkeley's *Siris*," writes Professor Dowden in his "Life of Browning": "the poem is, in fact, Browning's *Siris*—a chain of thoughts and feelings, reaching, with no break in the chain, from a humble basis to the heights of speculation."

"*Siris*," says Mr. Arthur Balfour in his Essay on "Berkeley's Life and Letters," "is the most singular treatise which has probably ever proceeded from the pen of an Anglican divine. It was written when its author was occupied half in treating his sick, and half in the lofty but somewhat vague speculations dear to him in his later years. It begins by enumerating the diseases for which tar-water may be successfully prescribed. Little more than a third of the treatise, however, is devoted to this wondrous study. By a rapid transition Berkeley leaves tar-water and plunges

into chemistry; from chemistry he ascends to physics; from physics to metaphysics; from metaphysics to theology . . . from the purely utilitarian, if not vulgar, topics with which it began to the airiest heights of mystical philosophy. The book contains every subject from tar-water to the Trinity.”—*Arthur Balfour: Essay published in the “ National Review,” March or April, 1883.*

In “ Fifine-at-the-Fair ” Browning but touched evil to pity it. The outcast woman was considered as the necessary blot of civilisation when Browning drew her into the open in “ Fifine-at-the-Fair,” and pleaded for her with the virtuous woman, and stated the case for her in the name of Humanity. For the bold championship of woman’s right to purity in “ Fifine-at-the-Fair,” for his introduction of this problem of civilisation, for his mere touch of pitch in the opening lines of “ Fifine-at-the-Fair,” he was branded as treating wantonly the subject of conjugal love, than which no charge could have been more lying and foolish. For this sympathy with the problem of the outcast woman, Gladstone almost fell from his pedestal, in the chivalrous attempt to champion her cause. He but suffered a temporary wave of ignorant misapprehension, but Browning paid dearly for it. For those who passed on the lie of sensualism as essence of the poem of “ Fifine-at-the-Fair,” who claimed that here conjugal infidelity was excused by Browning, the whole symbolism of this piece of his work is lost. If ignorantly, through want of apprehension; or wilfully, through disinclination to read so long a poem—then is the critic in a dilemma each horn of which is sharper than the other.

CHAPTER IX

“PACCHIAROTTO, AND HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER”

Browning to his critics, May, 1876—Explosive temper—Retaliatory mood—Personal confessions—Secrecy—Optimism—Insight of readers necessary—Blindness of critics—Miss Barrett’s opinion of critics of 1846—Art the heritage of all—Truth the compulsion of Art—Love the poet’s theme—Mystic approval—Mystic apprehensions of divinity of Christ—Patriotism—Poem written to raise funds for starving people of Paris—£100 from *Cornhill* for poem “Hervé Riel”—Truth-glimpsing—Parting word to critics—For rough palates, rough vintage—Refined palates, delicate wine.

THE series called “Pacchiarotto, and How he Worked in Distemper,” was published in 1876. It has utterances put into the mouth of the old Italian painter Giacomo Pacchiarotto, who took reform for his motto.

It begins with a Prologue of mystic import, presenting the faith that it is possible to divine happenings and gain freedom for the soul outside the body’s wall of flesh, giving a paradoxical maxim for gaining freedom :

“ Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing
That’s spirit : though cloistered fast, soar free.”

The speaker is in an explosive temper ; he is in a retaliatory mood ; he resents the critics who are under his window this May Day, and flings back their gibes, and laughs out his laugh at them :

“ Of goose born to cackle and waddle and bite at man’s
heel
As goose wont is : clear cackle is easily uttered.”

The poet puts his indignation into the utterance of the old painter, who was famous for his frescoes. He was

insurrectionary to popular ideas, this old painter, and relates some of the experiences that happened to him in consequence. The heart of man, he said, was stubborn, so he worked for his own pleasure, filling his walls with frescoes to suit himself. He was one of the spare horses, the upsetter of the regular team. He was driven to loathsome sheltering, starved to commoner frame of mind. He had learnt his lesson from an experience beside a corpse in his hiding-place, but "things seldom go well at rehearsal," he knows.

He turns on his critics with turbulent words, threatens indignities to them. They would clean his chimneys; they say he ought to consume his own smoke. He bids them be off, or fare as Socrates is said to have fared at the hands of Xantippe.

The poems comprising the Pacchiarotto Series are: "At the Mermaid"; "House"; "Shop"; "Pisgah Sights"; "Fears and Scruples"; "Natural Magic"; "Magical Nature"; "Hervé Riel"; "Bifurcation"; "Numpholeptos"; "Appearances"; "St. Martin's Summer"; "A Forgiveness"; "Cenciaga"; "Filippo Balducci on the Privilege of Burial"; "Epilogue."

"At the Mermaid" is a monologue uttered in the Mermaid Tavern in the midst of the critical company wont to gather there, and under the influence of "sherris" the speaker relaxes a little and confides to his audience that he has a secret. But he is not going to give it to them:

"Here's the work I hand this scroll,
Yours to take or leave: as duly
Mine remains the unproffered soul."

Is he Shakespeare's successor? they ask him. "Sciolists, my name is Ben," is the reply.

And is he unhappy? Does he suffer Byronic "Welt-Schmerz"? He replies with a contemptuous quotation of Biblical origin. Does he find earth grey? "Know this," he replies:

“ I find earth not grey but rosy,
 Heaven not grim, but fair of hue.
 Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
 Do I stand and stare? All's blue.”

In “ Shop ” he deplotes the bread-and-butter work of life; he pities the being who knows nothing else but business and the “ money chink.” He wants the spirit of man to have its freedom from sordid material cares: man should exercise his soul between times, should paint, or rhyme, or, “ haply mute, blow out his brains upon the flute.” The angel of man is silenced under mere money chink, he is of opinion.

In “ House ” he asks, shall he sonnet sing about himself as others have done?—

“ Unlock my heart with a sonnet key.”

No; he will keep his house-front up, till the fall of the frontage permits your feast. On the inside arrangement your praise or blame may be given later. But now:

“ Outside should suffice for evidence:
 And whoso desires to penetrate
 Deeper, must dive by the spirit-sense—
 No optics like yours, at any rate!”

he flings at his critics.

You think Shakespeare let you explore his “ house ” with the sonnet key, he says:

“ Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!”

Browning wrote but two sonnets, neither of which was included in his published work—one in early life over the signature of “ Z ” in the *Monthly Repository*, in 1834, the other the “ Sonnet to Edward Fitzgerald,” in 1889.

In the early poems, “ Paracelsus ” and “ Sordello,” Browning placed his mystical secret and declared the method his art was to follow:

“ The lowest hind should not possess a hope,
A fear, but I'd be by him, saying better
Than he his own heart's language. I would live
For ever in the thoughts I thus explored,
As a discoverer's memory is attached
To all he finds; they should be mine henceforth,
Imbued with me, though free to all before:
For clay, once cast into my soul's rich mine,
Should come up crusted o'er with gems.”

Paracelsus, Part II.

“ I cannot feed on beauty for the sake of beauty alone,”
says Paracelsus, “ I must know.” That scientific mind
could not rest with intuition alone of the spirit of man;
it must gather human testimony to support it:

“ I still must hoard and heap and class all truths
With one ulterior purpose. I must know.”

Beyond the literal truths called to give themselves up
at the bidding of imaginative truth, as in the old skeleton
plays of Shakespeare, draping themselves with new tissue
of palpitating flesh and refined nerve and readier muscular
response to environment, there is transcendently in Shake-
speare and Browning the vital thing that makes the skele-
ton story alive: the living soul speaks through it, the
living spirit uses it. Shakespeare took the old story of
“ Hamlet ” and put new material of vital interest to his
own time into it. So Browning took cover in the shade
of “ Sordello,” and informed it with the vital spark to
light up material of deep moment to mankind's develop-
ment. Genius knows its task, its duty, its compulsions,
as well as its ravishments, its divinities, its internal solace.
Says Hamlet:

“ This world is out of joint. O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right.”

“ Why hast Thou, he groaned,
Imposed on me a burthen Paul had moaned
And Moses dropped beneath? Much done—and yet
Doubtless that grandest task God ever set
On man, left much to do.”

Sordello, Book V.

Wordsworth knew in his flash of illumination that a great gulf was fixed: unless sinning greatly, he was thenceforward "a dedicated spirit." So the ancients pictured power springing full born from the brain out of the illuminating flash of mystic seeing.

In "Sordello," beyond the flashes of mystical confession is placed the poet's ideal of a working compromise with his illumination. His purpose was the lofty task of the mystic—to reveal his secret yet conceal it from vulgar handling. It was to be the light broken to rainbow shapes, not the whole light of the mystic's intuition. His purpose was to be true to his seeing, to make others see. His method of service to his race and country was by—

"Dim, vulgar, vast, unobvious work";

to lift mankind's

"Dim, vulgar, vast, unobvious grief"

by his

"Transcendental platan! mounting gay.
I offer unveil the last of mysteries.
Man's inmost life shall have yet freer play:
Once more I cast external things away,
And natures composite, so decompose
That . . . Why, he writes *Sordello*!"

Sordello, Book V.

"And I cherish most," says "Pauline," his first poem,
"My love of England—how her name, a word
Of hers in a strange tongue makes my heart beat."

In the preface to "Paracelsus" the poet writes:

"Were the scenes stars, the reader's co-operating fancy
must connect chasms and scattered lights into one constellation—a lyre or a crown."

"You may not like the strong stimulant I have to use," say the concluding lines of "Sordello," "but it will help to keep the soul awake"; and says Luigi the patriot, in the poem of "Pippa Passes":

"You'll love me yet—and I can tarry
Your love's protracted growing:
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry
From seeds of April's sowing."

In the poems "At the Mermaid," "House," and "Shop," Browning flung the information that he had a secret which he declined to pass on directly to the coarse thumb and finger of the world.

The faculty of intuition is now conceded to be operative in the discovery of truth: it is to native faculty of intellect and the intuitions ministering to them, combined with an infinite power of persistent work, and patience to wait for results, that genius owes its being. It is a more or less accepted belief now, that intuition is capable of directly apprehending truth; that it is a faculty capable of insight into reality, a quality of soul which apprehends and is extended at times to externals by the power of imagination, and may arrive at conclusions without the mediation of the intellect:

"Let others reason and welcome, 'tis we musicians know,"

says Abt Vogler, the mystic and psychologist.

"Wholly distrust thy reason," is Browning's advice in difficulty, which, as artist, he states, leaving it where it rises for solution. By the use of paradox Browning gives the shock which arrests thought. In the poem of "Rabbi Ben Ezra," paradox is the method of the philosopher which gives the mind of the reader pause, to enable it to digest the lofty conceptions of philosophy and spiritual faith.

The poem "A Grammarian's Funeral" presents Browning's lofty ideal of life: a noble soul devoted to the unwearying pursuit of knowledge, an unperplexed faith that the seeker shall find, and that the soul hydroptic with a sacred thirst shall be filled. The poet himself supremely wrote his own epitaph while providing a working chart to the thousands following untracked seas of adventurous

thought, of perilous quest, of intellectual toil, of spiritual bafflement :

“ He was a man born with thy face and throat,
 Lyric Apollo !
 Long he lived nameless : how should spring take note
 Winter would follow ?
 Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone !
 * * * * *
 “ ‘ This man said rather, ‘ Actual life comes next ?
 Patience a moment !
 Grant I have mastered learning’s crabbed text,
 Still there’s the comment.’
 * * * * *
 “ ‘ Others mistrust and say, ‘ But time escapes :
 Live now or never !’
 He said, ‘ What’s Time ? Leave Now for dogs and
 apes !
 Man has Forever.’
 * * * * *
 “ ‘ That low man seeks a little thing to do,
 Sees it and does it :
 This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
 Dies ere he knows it.’ ”

To conserve, to build up rather than to demolish and attempt to lay in the dust institutions that have served the race ; to be very sure that there is something better to take the place of the old edifices in which mankind has housed itself, even upon what may seem shaking foundations : better to adopt a compromise between new and old institutions, rather than incontinently raze the old ladders to the ground in attempt to build up the visionary’s dream of a city of perfection—was Browning’s philosophy from first to last.

That the method of compromise he was obliged to adopt troubled his soul in the late middle years of his life, we may assume from the insistence of the subject of compromise in the poems of this time—“ *Fifine-at-the-Fair* ” and “ *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society*.” His compromise of art by which to convey what he believed

to be truth of highest importance to mankind, is confessed in the conclusion of “ The Ring and the Book.”

In letters to Miss Barrett, Browning confessed his deep secretiveness, the impossibility to him of speaking direct. “ You speak out,” he wrote : “ I can only make men and women speak ” ; and in the dedication of the poems “ Men and Women ” he again expressed his method :

“ Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead, or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem.”

But the soul from which they sprang was for her alone :

“ God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul sides,—one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her.”

The long-drawn-out desolateness of his poetic early and middle age had not greatly lightened in 1876, since Miss Barrett wrote in 1846 :

“ Is there any reason,” she writes, “ for a man’s wits dwindling the moment he gets into a high critical place? In the *New Quarterly* Mr. Browning figures pleasantly as ‘ one without any sympathy for a human being.’ And you are never misty, not even in ‘ Sordello,’ never vague. . . . And the suggested virtue of self-renunciation . . . what atheists these critics are after all—and how the old heathens understood the divinity of gifts better beyond comparison! We may take shame to ourselves looking back—genius precedes, initiates. It is genius which gives an age its character and imposes its own colour. . . . I have sometimes thought that it would be a curious and instructive process, as illustrative of the wisdom and apprehensiveness of critics, if any one would collect the critical soliloquies of every age touching its own literature (as far as such may be extant), and compare them with the literary product of the said ages. . . . As far as I can remember, he (Sir Philip Sidney) saw even Shakespeare indifferently. Oh, it was in his eyes quite an unilluminated age, that period of Elizabeth which we see full of suns! and few can see what is close to their eyes, though they run their heads against it: the denial of contemporary genius is the rule rather than the exception. No one counts the eagles in the nest till there is a rush of wings; and lo!

they are flown. . . . Of the great body of critics you observe rightly, that they are better than might be expected of their badness, only the fact of their *influence* is no less undeniable than the reasons why they should not be influential. The brazen kettles will be taken for oracles all the world over. But the influence is for to-day, for this hour—not for to-morrow and the day after—unless, as you say, the poet do himself perpetuate the influence by submitting to it."

The mystic poem "Numpholeptos" discovers by its title a being "caught or entranced by a nymph." According to Greek myth, men could glimpse the nymphs, the daughters of Zeus, the maidens of heaven. The nymphs of the rivers were Naiads—of the woods, Dryads. The worshippers of the nymphs were called Nympholepti—they were supposed to lose their human reason, but gained at the same time a superior wisdom. Once glimpsed, the Nympholept's whole life was afterwards spent in pursuit of the nymph.

In the poem the speaker represents himself as entranced by a nymph. He worships her; he is tasked by her to pass on a pure white light that she loves: as light breaks up to its primary colours, this pure light, too, refracts its corresponding rays of colour. This mistress is never satisfied with his traversing of the beams of light—he is never wholly successful. He fares forth in the yellow ray again this day at her bidding, hoping to completely please her; but she would have him walk the pure light's white, and he can only track some ray of its prism with success—yet ever hopefully he fares forth, longing for the approval of that—

"Slow, sad, sweet smile—which I obey."

The poem of "Numpholeptos" is a mystic poem. It is a presentation of the allurements of those glimpses of truth—the spiritual light—the truth which the mystic feels, which he has unceasingly to decompose to its primary colours to make it visible to others, as the colours of pure

light become visible only on obstructions to its rays. The pure beam of light passes through space without colour, only when broken its hues can be known. “ Light ” is Browning’s description of that pure truth which he would pass on. He fares forth on all the colours of the spectrum. He is caught by this nymph of truth, has fugitive glimpses of her. He works unceasingly on one or the other of its rays—mostly the golden ray of love. It is an almost impossible ideal of service, but one that has to be followed up time after time, says the poem, by the lover of the maidens of mystic truth.

The poem “ Fears and Scruples ” postulates a personality hidden from human view, but to whom human beings are visible. It is a personality round which criticism rages. His letters are called forgeries, yet the friend below loves the unseen friend above, and believes in his existence. Perhaps the apparent concealment is of the human material—perhaps this friend unseen, blames him for the concealment. Someone querulously asks, “ Are there no windows even? It is monstrous to lay on you the blame that bricks conceal.” But the man stating the case has a fierce word for that charge : “ Hush, I pray you ! What if this friend should happen to be God ? ”

This passion of faith in Christ is protest against that dominant temper of the time when “ Fears and Scruples ” was written—the intellectual doubt of the historical evidences that Jesus even lived ; that these writings about Him were perhaps mere speculations or a putting together of sayings long after the event. These arguments that go on about his friend, says the speaker, rouse his fury. To this criticism his anger reacts : “ How I wish I could stop your foolish mouth—you brute, you ! ”

In the poem “ A Forgiveness ”—one of the “ Pacchiarotto ” series—is the presentment of a passion of resent-

ment that had waited with consummate patience to gain its implacable end of revenge. Under a mask of indifference the husband lives beside the betrayers of his confidence and love, till, when at last his wife, stung by his indifference, avows she loves him, he turns upon her his scorn and contempt. When she turns her dagger upon herself in remorse, he proceeds to the monk who has wronged him; and in calm statement, under the guise of confession, opens his mind, and with a subtle vindictiveness states his case, and at the last word a dagger-stroke ends the position. This poem, he confessed, is one "I should not object to be judged by."

In "Cenciaga" the corruption of the Church in 1600 is avenged by the poem of 1870, as he puts it himself.

When asked to explain the meaning of his title "Cenciaga" and the Italian motto which heads the poem, Browning wrote to his correspondent:

"*Cenciaga* means, in Italian: 'a bundle of rags—a trifle.' The proverb means, 'Every poor creature will be pressing into the company of his betters,' and I used it to deprecate the notion that I meant anything of the kind. The details were taken from the old yellow square book from which the poem 'The Ring and the Book' sprang, and in a reference to the reason given by Farinacci, the advocate of the Cenci, of his failure in the defence of Beatrice, who was prepared to avow the main outrage and did not."

"Hervé Riel" was a poem written in 1871 to help the Paris Relief Fund after the siege of 1870. The *Cornhill Magazine* gave £100 for it, which sum Browning handed over to the fund for providing food for the starving people. It was afterwards published in the "Pacchiarotto" volume.

The story of "Hervé Riel" is historical, and relates the gallant deed of a Breton sailor of Le Croisic who saved the remains of the French fleet off La Hogue in 1692.

The heroic sailor was asked what he wished for reward. He had but one wish, he said—a day's holiday, that he might see his wife.

In “ *Pisgah Sights* ” is the analogy that all the face of the landscape seems to blend into a harmonious whole seen from below ; the poem asks questions of life.

Would it all be lived over again so, he asks, if higher vision could have been achieved? And, instead of this illusion of the straight path leading up so easily, would it have been different if he had been able to look down and see the breaks in it?

“ *Filippo Baldinucci on the Privilege of Burial* ” has for subject another view of medieval times and persecution of the Jews, as has the poem “ *Holy Cross Day*.” The story depicts the “ good old times ” of the speaker’s youth, when tricks could be played on the Jews : he will tell a good story of this time, and how the Jews tricked the Christians in their turn. This poem shows a joke that turned upon its perpetrators.

In the Epilogue to “ *Pacchiarotto* ” Browning gives his critics his parting advice in a dissertation upon the flavour and body of the poet’s wine, and the scope and purpose of poetry as stimulating and invigorating. He is sarcastic as to their vaunted appreciation of Shakespeare—and how much is Milton read? The public find fault with his work, but his wine at least makes himself felt, even through the furred tongue of the public : it is nettle-broth that they need, and he gives it here, and has more delicate vintage for those who can appreciate wine—he lets the others have the nettle-broth till their tastes are higher.

In this series, Browning packed his policy into a couplet :

“ A peep through my window, if folk prefer ;
But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine ! ”
House.

CHAPTER X

" *LA SAISIAZ* "

A holiday in Italy—Sudden death of a friend—Poem retraces circumstances—Deeply affected at his friend's death—Love of music had been great bond between them—Dispassionate, lengthy presentment of the poet's belief in a life after death—Reasoned grounds of his hope—His fundamental faiths—God and the soul.

IN the year 1877, Browning, his sister, and their friend Miss Ann Egerton Smith, were spending a holiday at La Saisiaz, on the Lake of Geneva. Browning and Miss Smith had taken a long walk together on the day September 13th. During the night Miss Smith was seized with heart trouble, and died suddenly on September 14th, 1877.

In 1878, Browning published the poem "*La Saisiaz* (A. E. S., September 14th, 1877)."

The poem retraces the last walk that he and Miss Smith had taken together, and records the one they had proposed for themselves on the morrow. Death had suddenly snatched this friend from his side; and in a long series of reflections, the poet faces the question of his faith in life after death. His soul has been deeply stirred by the death of his friend, this irrevocable break in the human story; so he faces the question and asks, what vitality is there in his faith in the continuance of life after death? And he would come to terms with his intellect as to what he really believes: What are the grounds of his faith that the soul does survive the body? What arguments for immortality has he to show? What is his case? Why should he believe in the soul's continued existence after death? Why believe this life is preliminary to another? Why should he believe in the evolution of spirit from body, and

another not believe? What are the credentials for his faith?

And the conclusion of the dialogue between Fancy and Reason is perhaps just hope :

“ Hope the arrowy, just as constant, comes to pierce its
gloom compelled
By a power and by a purpose which if no one else beheld
I behold in life, so—hope!

“ Sad summing-up of all to say!

Athanasius contra mundum, why should he hope more
than they?
So are men made notwithstanding, such magnetic virtue
darts
From each head their fancy halves to their unresisting
hearts!”

The poet can only speak for himself; his say can only be said for his own soul. Death is issue between God and the individual human being—can one soul impute its faith to another? So the question can but remain the experience of each.

“ Mine for me. But those apparent other mortals theirs for
them?
Knowledge stands on my experience. . . .
Here’s my neighbour colour-blind,
Eyes like mine to all appearance: ‘green as grass,’ do I
affirm?
‘Red as grass,’ he contradicts me: which employs the
proper term?
Were we two the earth’s sole tenants, with no third for
referee;
How should I distinguish? Just so, God must judge
’twixt man and me.”

When facing the questions of “Does the soul survive the body? Must we count life a curse, and not a blessing?” the speaker confesses the limitations of his knowledge. He can but speak for himself—“he, at least, believed in soul, was very sure of God.”

He again postulates his theory, as in “Saul,” that perhaps God Himself is limited in power; that without

co-operating forces from the soul God is powerless to compass and bring to perfection His scheme in the creation of the being of man ; that without soul co-operation God Himself is powerless :

“ As I am a man,” says the poem,
 “ I mourn this poverty I must impute.”

“ Such as man is, limited, bounded, I conceive God to be.”

That the mystery of soul baffled human comprehension ; that the gap between body and soul, material and spiritual, death and life, was capable of explanation only by grasps of guess by imagination's leaps towards the sun ; that the mystery was beyond human comprehension—proved its probability. How could finite being comprehend the Infinite?

In the Prologue to “ Dramatic Idylls,” Second Series, Browning draws attention to the inability of the intellect to understand the workings of the body : how, then, understand soul ? In the Epilogue he gives the opinion that the quickly receptive sense is not the soil from which the seed of genius springs to its true height.

In other poems he draws attention to the mystery of sense impressions and their translation into knowledge by the apparatus designed to relate man to his external world : the ear with its mysterious mechanism hungry for sound, in the poem of “ Cleon ” ; the analogy of the cricket-chirp in the Epilogue to the “ Two Poets of Croisic ” ; the cricket with note so attenuated that only exceptional hearing can catch all its vibrations, is the analogy of responsiveness to vibrations of spiritual love.

The power of human receptiveness is unequal, decaying with disuse, growing into use. Colour-blindness is drawn attention to in the poem “ La Saisiaz ” ; about four men in a hundred are deficient in power to distinguish colours, we are told.

Is man's power, to add by his spirit a further extension of sense perception, a finer sense to seize finer being ?

The poem “La Saisiaz” opened up the vast question again for Browning, the question that he faced in “Christmas Eve and Easter Day,” “Sordello” and “Paracelsus”: why should some “believe” and others not? Is it a question of fundamentals, heredity, race, more developed aptitudes? Is it merely a finer discriminating power in recognising and interpreting and seizing finer sense impressions?

Can those believe only who are built that way? Must “flesh refine to spirit’s use”? Is it the taught already who can alone benefit by teaching? In this poem the poet draws attention to the question of sense perception. Sense apprehension being proficient, a certain mode of motion produces perfection of physical sight, or produces limitations of discrimination if further light rays fail the apparatus of the eye. Is it but a finer mode of motion, this, he speculates, which relates a finer environment to a finer organ—as sense perception varies as there are extensions of seeing, hearing, rarely if ever overtaken by the natural eye or ear (*e.g.*, the cricket-chirp in “A Tale”)? May not the question of why some believe, and not others, belong to a domain of spiritual physics, out of the possibility of the many to compass, to be taken on the faith of the graduate in spiritual physics? May not varying modes of motion between the ethereal environment of man and his organs of apprehension be responsible for the mystic’s faith? In the analogy of the power of discriminating certain waves of energy beating upon the apparatus of the eye, Browning draws a probable parallel of the mystery of why some believe, in a finer organ of environment beating upon a finer organ of apprehension of ethereal energy—the spiritual environment—the soul. How the rich apprehensions of the eye are produced in co-operation with the organism of the eye and its environment, explain first, says the poem.

The transcendental moment out of which “believing” springs is no figment of the brain, Browning iterates and

reiterates; it is through some great complex of emotion that faith becomes lost in sight. The moment of ecstasy out of which the new life of the mystic rises is a culminating-point of emotion leading to new conceptions which both add to, and displace, the old stock, and rearrange to new light.

He retraces his previous day's walk with his friend, recalls her living charm, pays tribute to her gracious friendship to him. In this poem he places in art again the varied beauty of the Italian landscape, and marvels upon the mystery of man's possession of the world of beauty around him by the wonder of the senses by which he relates the world of material beauty to himself. He joys in this world of beauty and his possession of it :

" Oh, the little more, and how much it is !
And the little less, and what worlds away ! "

By the Fireside.

The mysteries of the human mechanism are beyond human comprehension. How the mystery of the senses developed can only be postulated as certain nervous matter becoming sensitive to environment, perfecting by the sum of inherited adaptations, the condition of development, of life itself being adaptability to environment—the readiness of certain mechanism to receive impressions and tenacity in retaining them, the power to reason upon the process essential to the evolution from lower to higher organisms.

There are gaps inexplicable to the evolutionary process. When faith takes its flying leap, says Browning, the soul uses its wings.

In the poem Browning pays tribute to the memories of the men who have made the neighbourhood of La Saisiaz famous—Voltaire, Rousseau, Byron, Gibbon—asking what each gave worth remembering.

Was it their fame gave the words of those men their power over their kind ?

" Fame ! Then give me fame a moment, "
says the writer of " La Saisiaz " :

“ Lo, I lift the coruscating marvel—Fame! and, famed,
declare—

Learned for the nonce as Gibbon, witty as wit’s self
Voltaire.

O the sorriest of conclusions to whatever man of sense
’Mid the millions stands the unit, takes no flare for
evidence!

Yet the millions have their portion, live their calm or
troublous day,

Find significance in fireworks: so, by help of mine, they
may

Confidently lay to heart and lock in head their life long—
this:

“ He there with the brand flamboyant, broad o’er night’s
forlorn abyss,

Crowned by prose and verse; and wielding, with Wit’s
bauble, Learning’s rod

Well? Why, he at least believed in Soul, was very sure of
God.”

Browning and Miss Egerton Smith had first met in Florence. She was an English lady of means, and of a reserved temperament which kept her aloof from people in general.

The death of Miss Egerton Smith left a serious blank in Browning’s life. Their bond had been interest in music. She was possessed of an independency, and their practical sympathy with music was to attend musical entertainments together, and to share summer holidays with the poet and his sister. The visit to La Saisiaz was the third holiday so spent, and the catastrophe there, says Mrs. Orr,

“ closed a comprehensive chapter in his habits and experience. It impelled him to break with the associations of the last seventeen summers. The always latent desire for Italy sprang up in him, and with it the often present thought and wish to give his sister the opportunity of seeing it. Florence and Rome were not included in the scheme; but he hankered for Asolo and Venice. They travelled to Asolo in the September of 1878, and then on to Venice, and seven times more in the eleven years remaining the autumn holiday was spent in Venice.”

CHAPTER XI

"THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC"

Poems resulting from summer holidays in Brittany and Normandy—Two French poets—Mystic worldling—Tricking the critics—Appreciation of French friend of poet, Joseph Milsand—Characters of Browning and Milsand by Mrs. Richmond Ritchie—Mystical lines as epilogue to poem—Divine love—Human love—Sarcasm of Browning for interpreters.

IN 1878, in the same volume as "*La Saisiaz*," appeared "*The Two Poets of Croisic*."

"*The Two Poets of Croisic*" is a poem recalling two poets who became famous in the annals of the town of Croisic, in Brittany. The region is described in the poem with all the realism of Browning's truth to Nature.

The first personage it immortalised was Rene Gentilhomme, a rhymer, who had hopes of succeeding his cousin in his dukedom, but the birth of an heir dashed his dream. The disaster had been heralded by the striking of the ducal crown by lightning, interpreted by the page of Rene Gentilhomme, who was also called Rene, and also wrote sonnets and madrigals. This power of prophecy was appropriated by his master, who was thenceforward honoured by the name Royal Poet.

The second poet of Croisic was a man who was famous for having done something to make Voltaire ridiculous. His poem submitted to the Academy was rejected. The enraged Poet offered his work to the editor of the *Paris Mercury*, who also rejected it, because he couldn't afford to offend the Academicians. After listening to the abuse and remonstrance of Paul, the editor confessed that his real reason for rejecting the poem was because it was execrable work, but he would have preferred not giving this true reason to the poet. This further enraged Paul,

who perpetrated the joke of causing his poems to be copied by his sister, who sent them to the great editor, and begged his favour and introduction to a literary career by it. The editor was hoaxed, and published his poems again and again under the sister's name—the name of Malcraïs. Voltaire also was deceived, and wrote praises of the authoress enough to make one sick, in literal interpretation of Browning's epithet for them—“a stomach-moving tribute.”

The brother at last in disgust determined to expose the ruse by which he had obtained recognition for his work. His explanation was received with contumely—the editor declined to believe the story, Voltaire discredited it. Paul Maillard's career, says the poem, was over, caused by his inability to keep silence under injustice. There was a play upon the story, famous in its day, called “Metromanic.”

Each poet stood convicted of deception, but who cares for the stories of these obscure poets? says Browning.

This poem deals with the lives of two poets of bygone time who were credited with strange happenings in their lives, upon which their success and fame hung. Suddenly these commonplace lives became notable by reason of certain events in their careers. Who cares, says Browning, what lifted these two mediocrities to fame—and why? And how did it go with their lives after this flash-point was spent? There are two points resultant to such flashes, he declares—one the raving of the lunatic, one the flights of genius. How was it that such lives went on their normal way? he is curious to know. For such mediocrities, who cares? he asks :

“Well, I care,” he answers—“intimately care to have
Experience how a human creature felt
In after life, who bore the burden grave
Of certainly believing God had dealt
For once directly with him : did not rave—
A maniac, did not find his reason melt—
An idiot, but went on, in peace and strife,
The world's way, lived an ordinary life.”

As Epilogue to "The Two Poets of Croisic," Browning placed the elusive lines given in his selected edition under the title "A Tale."

It is the tale of a singer, who, competing for a prize, found one of the strings of his lyre snap :

" All was lost then! No! a cricket
(What 'Cicada?' Pooh!)—
Some mad thing that left its thicket
For mere love of music—flew
With its little heart on fire,
Lighted on the crippled lyre."

Thus, so the tale relates, his triumph came from the blue to the singer—he won the prize. "Did the conqueror spurn the creature once its service done?"

This the poem answers, and the tale and its application he leaves the reader to discover :

" But you don't know music! Wherefore
Keep on casting pearls
To a—poet! All I care for
Is—to tell him that a girl's
'Love' comes aptly in when gruff
Grows his singing (There enough)."

In 1873 was published "Red-cotton Night-cap Country; or, Turf and Towers." It is dedicated to Miss Thackeray, who later, as Mrs. Richmond Ritchie, wrote her reminiscences of the poet, in the volume "Tennyson, Ruskin, and Browning."

"Red-Cotton Night-cap Country; or, Turf and Towers" is almost a literal rendering of a story of real life, which was related to Browning in Brittany. Miss Thackeray was also visiting Brittany. She called it "White-cotton Night-cap Country," because of the white caps all the women wore, and because of the sleepy, soothing atmosphere of Normandy.

After hearing the story of the tragedy told in the poem,

Browning remarked that “ Red-cotton Night-cap Country ” would be the more appropriate term.

The story concerned a young man, Léonce Miranda, son of a Paris jeweller, who lived with his family at the Château Clairvaux, near St. Aubin’s—the watering-place where Browning was spending the summer holidays. It is the story of a young man falling in love with an adventuress, marrying her, and living in unbridled extravagance with her at the family home. Among other alterations he built a tower at the old house, in order better to view the scenery. He was called to Paris by his mother, who remonstrated with him. Her reproaches so affected him that he attempted suicide in the Seine. He was saved from this end and nursed back to life by Clara, his wife, at the Château. His mother died, and, filled with remorse, Léonce was upbraided by the family as the cause of his mother’s death. He gave up his property to them, and with his wife prepared to leave the old home. His mind was unhinged : he carried Scriptural injunction out to the letter, and put his hand in the fire because he conceived it had given offence—this, he asserted, would bring him salvation. He became restored to health, sold his business, went back to the château, was reconciled to his wife under the delusion that she was no longer a temptress—a woman, but his brother.

At this point Browning is stated by Dr. Berdoo, in his “ Cyclopædia,” to have put his superstruction upon the original story by bringing Léonce under the influence of religion. He devoted himself to good works and made gifts to the Church. He was striving to save his soul by charitable acts. He made pilgrimage to a chapel containing a statue of the Virgin which commanded the veneration of the faithful, which had the reputation of performing miracles. Léonce paid a visit to “ Our Lady’s Shrine ” : he expected help from it, as others were reported to have been helped.

His exaltation carries his faith in Our Lady to the point

of putting her to the test. He ascended to the tower above the house. He addressed the Virgin as Queen of Angels, reproached her for not having helped him. He confessed he had burned his hands off at the promptings by her. He had given her his money : she must now help him by a miracle which will restore religion to France. He saw Our Lady smile—he will trust his faith in her. He sprang from the tower and lay dead on the turf the next moment.

“ Mad,” said a gardener who saw him fall. No : sane ! says the poet—he put faith to the proof : better put faith to the test—kill or cure.

The relatives contested the wife Clara’s inheriting his property, which he had left by will to her. There was a trial, in which she won. She was living at the Château Clairvaux, where Browning saw her in 1872. The real names were not given—it was deemed an almost libellous relation of the story even as told.

Joseph Milsand, the French *littérateur*, to whom “ Sor-dello ” was dedicated, was with Browning and his sister during this holiday in Normandy. The two friends spent their summer holiday together, and Milsand has his place in the poem inspired by that time.

“ No words can express the love I have for Milsand,” Browning once remarked.

To Milsand, alone of all the world, Browning read his manuscript and discussed his work with him.

“ What I value most,” said Milsand of Browning, “ is his simple, open, radiant goodness.” These two friends spent summer holidays together in Brittany ; on Sundays they went to the little chapel of Château-Blagny for Protestant worship together.

To Milsand, Browning suggested a power even greater than his performance, he wrote. Browning and Milsand were akin, says Lady Ritchie, “ in a certain delicate sensitiveness, a swift susceptibility to impressions ; but Browning vigorous and buoyant, Milsand nervous, thin, reserved.”

In this poem, “Red-cotton Night-cap Country,” Browning placed his appreciation and love for Milsand. Here, in the hearts of an Englishman and Frenchman, was already the Entente Cordiale to arise between their nations.

Of Milsand the poet wrote, as he watched him on the beach reading an English paper :

“ He knows more, and loves better, than the world
That never heard his name, and never may,
What hinders that my heart relieve itself,
Milsand, who makest warm my wintry world
And wise my heaven if there we consort too?”

CHAPTER XII

"DRAMATIC IDYLLS," FIRST SERIES

Heart searchings—Expediency or cowardice—Phenomenon of heredity—Of spiritual emotion—Cataclysm known as conversion—Story from Bunyan—Human problem—The unnatural mother—Primitive instinct to save life—Animal heroism—Human heroism in battle—Problem of defeat of Persians at Marathon—Germans at Mons—Supernaturalism or imagination—Power of mind over natural disadvantages.

IN 1879, "Dramatic Idylls," First Series, appeared, containing the poems, "Martin Relph"; "Pheidippides"; "Halbert and Hobb"; "Ivàn Ivanovitch"; "Tray"; "Ned Bratts."

In this series of poems the first is "Martin Relph."

This is examination of an old problem in the life of the speaker, raising a painful complex of doubt and pain and remorse, and earnest searching of heart to get at the truth of a certain action of his in his past life. He stands so in confession every first of May, he relates—stands and goes over the old question of the *bona fides* of a certain decision he took then. Was it genuine desire for his country's welfare prompted his act, or was it cowardice? Was it done in true zeal for his country, or a crucial point of conscience in which he failed? This searching of heart, the recital of the events told in the poem, he reverts to each anniversary of the day, recalling his poignant doubt of himself :

" I strike my brow, and publish the reason why,
When there gathers a crowd to mock the fool. No fool,
friends, since the bite
Of a worm inside is worse to bear : pray God
I have baulked him quite !"

It is a poignant note of doubt. The lover of Browning turns from it with a protest, a verdict of no coward—the patriot but ended the spy; the action was justified.

The poem “Ned Bratts” carries the story of “Old Tod,” told by Bunyan in his “Life and Death of Mr. Badman.”

The episode known in the Christian life as conversion is the material of the poem. Ned Bratts and his wife Tabitha have been converted, and the poem begins with tremendous rush of realism, both of the court of law and all the surroundings of the assize, and also of this phenomena of surrender—the first reaction of their emotion. There is the realistic picture of the past of old Tod and his wife, their breathless confession of their past evil lives, and demand to be punished lest they fall again into sin. This sudden changing of mind, with pronounced change of opinion and conduct, are constant themes of Browning’s art: in this poem the phenomenon, which produces sudden and profound reformation of character, is examined as a thing arising out of the work of Christian emotion under the Christian example of the great Bunyan.

This possibility of conversion is the practical fact, the central aim of Christian emotion; the avowed result is the seizing of the imagination by Christ, inducing a state of mind filled with desire to find stability and effective achievement in Christ and His ideals, His Person and Spirit and teaching. This culmination of emotion is the aim of Christian living.

Whether a profound subjective phenomenon, or a supremely spiritual and imaginative reality, the act of conversion is a real experience of the Christian life, attended by the reaction realistically depicted in the poem—self-surrender, that “sense of sin” so powerfully pictured as working in the breast of these two self-confessed breakers of the laws of man and God. A confession of

the unregenerate past, which clamours for forgiveness and punishment, is the first note of conversion.

Thus grotesquely presented, the poem states the case of, and pictures the working of this crisis in the history of Christian phenomena, out of which cataclysm the subject can, and does, arise to new and higher levels of conduct, as the annals of Christian biography record: from the profound cataclysm of Saul of Tarsus, who straightway rose to be Paul—from Saul the persecutor of the Christians, to Paul through whom all the churches round about had peace—to John Wesley, whose heart was “strangely warned,” and he rose never to waver in his faith again.

The phenomenon of conversion has now a literature of its own, but in Browning's day was little appreciated as a psychological problem hinting at some great message of psychical value, and with suggestion of a biological problem beneath it. Browning, with that sure evidence of his genius, presented in poem after poem that power of cataclysmic emotion to change the mind's point of view, those whirls of emotion which, be they what they may, those crises in human development which, from whatever source proceeding, react upon the lives experiencing them as the dramatic culmination of one state of thought or point of view, to emerge inevitably into another condition of character, with a new point of view, a new level of thought, with conviction and ideals diametrically opposed to the old point of view and plan of conduct, as if power to do inhered in this power to feel.

It is this dramatic moment of change of point of view that strings the poetry of Browning to unity. From lofty to low, from the cultivated minds of his great characters to the uncultivated and clamorous vulgar, as depicted in Old Tod and his wife Tabitha, the expression of personality subject to sudden and startling rearrangements generating new ideals, new energies, new efficiencies, is presented.

The subject of this climacteric of emotion is to-day approached with respect and scientific curiosity.

"The phenomena of conversion," writes a psychologist, "connotes surrender of will, and the entering on a more positive religious life, a coming to live in more general or universal life, a coming to see religion from within, and is not confined to churches or formulas. It appears to be complete co-ordination between the higher brain areas and the lower, is a birth of consciousness in a higher level, is the opening up of an ideal to be actualised as perception of a truth to be worked into conduct, a state of ecstasy, a sense of religion as a subjective possession, elements that are concerned in spiritual insight lying ready to function under the heat of some co-ordination of emotional pressure."—*E. B. Cutten, "Psychology of Alcoholism."*

"Conversion does not create a new tendency, but shows that the greatest antitheses are latent in us, and that one may replace the other, not by an act of will, but by a radical transformation of our sensibility."—*Professor James, "Varieties of Religious Emotion."*

"There is a cataclysm of emotion," says Cutten, "out of which the whole being emerges to an alteration of the whole moral and religious life. The frequency with which this phenomena is encountered in adolescence has led certain psychologists to connect the experience with the deep-seated physiological changes which mark the period—it is recognised as fact by psychologists that sudden conversion, profound and genuine reformation, is a thing met with at all ages and under the most various conditions, is fact of certain human developments.

"Belief in a perfect being as Christ; incarnation of all holiness, righteousness and truth, is highest religious faith.

"This ideal becomes the perfect companion of the highest self, the object worthy of complete reverence. Belief in such a being constitutes the essence of the most developed forms of religious faith; around such a person beliefs cluster all the world over."

"The great climacteric of emotion, the great controlling idea, arises in response to great need, to great urgency of mind to produce a great new generalisation to master the question the mind is confronted with, to the injury of itself or some other. It is probably an organic rearrangement in reply to necessity for outer rearrangement of affairs, perception, etc. . . . It is a focussing of all the past incitation of memory to rearrange things neural or emotional to meet the

emergency and accommodate itself to new and greater conditions; all antecedent consciousness is called upon, all past perceptions, all experience is related to the need of the moment to produce a new concept equal to the demand of the new need."—*H. Angell, Professor of Psychology, Chicago.*

"Conversion is induced by some overpowering impression upon the mind supplying a new and energetic motive to the will, thereby initiating new line of conduct sometimes with terrific struggles. It is a sudden forsaking of lower for higher region of mental action. It inhibits lower channels of nervous discharge, through the establishment of higher connections and identifications of the old with the new activities.

"It is a process by which a self hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy in consequence of its firmer hold on religious realities.

"It is a Divine and psychological co-operation, in profound sense of sin new man spontaneously emerges. It is the culminating act of struggling with sin rather than peaceful approach to righteousness."—*E. D. Starbuck, "Psychology of Religion."*

"The exaltation of conversion may be stimulated by hashish," says medical authority (Cutten), "implying that the one state may be as physical as the other, caused by differing intangible agencies, yet as certain in its results of the feeling of joy, gladness developed in the interior regions of brain, where some disturbance of the motor centres is excited by the unknown cause—called by Religion the breath of Spirit, which certain excitation of brain are capable of. Conversion may be a purely physical brain process, a rearrangement of new centres under new influences, a physiological process arising out of profound disturbance, setting up a pathological process inevitable to certain types of brain under certain emotions; a metamorphosis inevitable to certain heredity, which transmits this tendency, as surely as any physical bias inhering in the protoplasmic cells whose phenomena may be observed, but whose chemical nature is hidden."

This problem of personality, considered so obscure and confused when Browning wrote "*Paracelsus*" and "*Sordello*," is a commonplace of study now, the chatter of the psychic-intellectual, the investigations of the scientific metaphysician, the brain-searching aim of the neurologist,

the faith in imagination that produces the gold for Hobbs, Nobbs, and Stokes.

Because hashish and opium and alcohol stimulate the imagination, these illicit agencies are evoked and prevail among all races of mankind. To forget the animal, to find enlargement in the spiritual, to evade human responsibility, or as experiment to loosen intellect of its shackles : to so seek the imaginative upreach, which is the property and reward of the soul, is the practice of man seeking a disastrous short cut to the Divine.

It is not only to get oblivion from the personal equation, and sense of freedom from the material struggle in life, that mankind, all the world over, seeks material means of shifting the bounds of consciousness to the region of imagination. It is that counterfeit of spiritual exaltation, that generation of a sense of expanding being, of unlocking of faculty, of flight of fancy, of mind's enlargement, of exhilaration and extension of being, to that illimitable and irresponsible otherness, that freer circulation through the immaterial, otherwise ungraspable, environment of the mystic.

All these are but the counterfeited imagination, stimulated just so far by drugs and alcohol, as hint of that intoxication which is not of wine, of that drunkenness which is not of material agency, of that joyousness which the soul alone knows—true imagination, that spiritual elixir which is a sustained driving force, a true brain extensor, a rarefied stimulant from the spirit to the intellect of man.

The story of Ned Bratts is told by John Bunyan in his “ Life and Death of Mr. Badman,” who was converted by reading the story of Christian in the “ Pilgrim's Progress,” and he had also seen the Tinker in the Bedford cage, from whom he and his wife had bought lace, and he had seen the Tinker's daughter, who had given him her father's book which had set his soul on fire.

This story of Bunyan related that at the summer assizes

holden at Hartford, while the Judge was sitting on the Bench, came this Old Tod and his wife into the court, declaring they had been converted by the book, and, fearful that they will fall into sin again and miss Heaven's gate, they beg to the Court to sentence and hang them out of hand.

In this poem of "Ned Bratts" Browning presents this phenomenon for legal consideration, and, at the conclusion, the Judge sitting in this assize court wonders whether Judge had ever such a case before him. After thinking it over again, he concludes :

"Hanging you both deserve, hanged both shall be this day."

"Halbert and Hobb" is presentment of the mystery of heredity—like father, like son; brutal nature begetting brutal nature; a brawl of taunts and curses, the son's strength not greater than the father's. But suddenly a memory rises which paralyses the old man's heart and arm; so is told that strange trick which Nature can play. How can such brutal natures, hard hearts, be altered? How can such natures be changed? says the poem, quoting Shakespeare :

" 'Is there a reason in nature for those hard hearts,' O Lear?
That a reason out of nature must turn them soft, seems
clear."

"Ivàn Ivanovitch" is one of the wolf stories Browning brought back from his Russian trip in 1833, recalled out of the capacious storehouse of his brain forty years later, to point an emotion. It is the story of an unnatural mother fleeing with her children in a sledge before pursuing wolves. The mother threw her children one by one to the wolves and saved herself. The speaker of the poem, Ivàn Ivanovitch, relates how, when she appeared before

him telling what she had done, he struck her down. On trial for the murder was his simple defence :

" I could no other : God it was bade ' act for me.' "

The divinity of motherhood is frequently a pivotal point in Browning's art—womanhood means motherhood (" Inn Album ") ; it was probably the quickening point of " The Ring and the Book," Pompilia's discovery of motherhood, and fight for :

" So great a gift as this—God's own—of human life."

" Tray " is a poem relating the attempt of three bards to outdo each other in heroic story. Browning gives the palm to the story of Tray, a dog : a story of prompt response of dog nature to the call for help of the child fallen into the Seine. The bystanders think prudently and do nothing, the dog instinctively jumped in and brought her to land : then, with further care, Tray went in again after the child's doll, bringing it also to land. Bystanders prided themselves on their reason over the dog's instinct, but would like to know what is the secret of the dog's instinct to save ; and for reward poor Tray is vivisected to attempt to gain knowledge by man of how the dog's brain responded in this way. What secretes dog soul ? is what man wants to know. What gives the dog animal its instinctive aim to save life ? What faculty of divination sent Tray into the water to save the child, and again to save what looked to him like another child—the doll ? A bystander determines to kill the dog for this display of superiority, and find out what is in its brain to give it this instinct.

The poem of " Pheidippides " relates the experiences primarily of one Pheidippides, an athlete, who was commissioned by the Athenian Government to run hot-foot to Sparta, asking help of fighting men, because Persia,

demanding tokens of submission from Greece, was on the march to reduce it to submission. The invading host was met at the narrow pass of Marathon. The victory preserved the liberty of Greece, and through Greece the liberties of Europe, from the Oriental aggression and the dominion of Persia. The Battle of Marathon was fought in the month of September, 490 B.C.

The great god Pan was the protecting deity of the Greeks—god of the soil, of its flocks and herds and hunters. He was represented as half human, half animal, with pug nose, very hairy, and with horns and feet of the goat. His voice and appearance were reputed to frighten off those who saw him, hence the word “panic.”

The poem of “Pheidippides” relates the saving of Europe from the Persian despotism, from Asian invasion—a crisis in European history, that repulse of the invading hordes by the handful of Greeks at Marathon. It is quick with the spirit of Greek character and customs, with suspense and victory that followed. The athlete Pheidippides tells the story of the race for reinforcements—of the splendour and glory of the few fighting for victory against the crushing Oriental invasion. What saved the few as against the many? Whether on legendary authority, or as imaginative truth, Browning invigorates the poem, and voices the peculiar feature which unites this poem of the fight against the invading hosts of Persia at Marathon, the valiant handful of defenders at Marathon, to the imaginative beliefs of later wartime. Pan was with them fighting in their ranks, says Pheidippides—the great god Pan was with them; something above the natural was helping them.

This poem is of deep interest since the mysterious defeat of the Germans at Mons—the crucial moment in the great German invasion, their defeat then raising the never-ending question of the how, or why, of the turning of that stupendous conflict in favour of the Allies instead of to the invading conquering march of Germany.

In brief, the salient features of that situation were, that after the retreat from Mons men were found whispering with awe of strange appearances and happenings during the battle—a strange light in mid-air at night over the German lines, but facing the British ; a light described as of moving shape, the centre as of outstretched wings, the two others less defined ; the light observable for three-quarters of an hour at a time.

To the British soldiers this phenomenon, be it what it may, brought hope and faith in their invincibility, and the idea, “ God is with us,” grew and was expressed. The tension of nerves was loosened by that faith, and the long night march of thirty-two miles was accomplished. A Captain remarked to his men, “ Well, men, we can cheer up now ; we’ve got someone with us ” (Harold Begbie, “ On the Side of the Angels ”).

Officers were firmed up, men were heartened by this faith : conversion from timorous doubt to vigorous effort, from drinking to temperance, from fearful looking ahead to hopeful pushing on, are authentically recorded.

The legend grew, that beside the British army in retreat were shadowy squadrons of cavalry. One officer, a Lieutenant-Colonel, wrote afterwards that on the retreat from Mons on August 27th, 1914, he became conscious of this fact of these shadowy attendants, who seemed to be riding across the fields, going in the same direction as themselves. Certain officers reconnoitred to solve the mystery, but it vanished before them, and the spirit grew among them that there were supernatural forces on their side.

Another legend runs, that as the Germans advanced to the British lines in overwhelming numbers, a cloud of light appeared, and out of it a tall man, with yellow hair, in golden armour and on a white horse, appeared, holding his sword up and leading the British on when the case seemed hopeless. The further legend grows, on the German side, that, as the British approached, their horses

swerved as if frightened, which intimidated them in fear that the British had used "some form of devilment against them." The man on the white horse was accredited with a company of men with bows and arrows.

So the legend of Mons grew. How relate it to the fact of victory psychologically, or imagination spiritually?

The poem of "Pheidippides" recalls these mysteries of the defeat of the many by the few. Browning saved the spirit of Marathon's victory. What poet to come will embalm the spirit of Mons, and the imaginative situation which produced, perhaps, that resistance and gave inexplicable success to the Allied unprepared handful, against the consolidated deeply planned scheme of the German hosts?

The poem of "Pheidippides" gains interest and point at this swirl of the parting of the ways. That the Battle of Mons broke the power of the oncoming invasion, and how it came about so, is one of the unsolved riddles of the story so fraught with undreamed-of worldwide consequences.

Just so, the poem of "Pheidippides" relates the legend of divine help to the Athenians in their defence at Marathon, of Greece against the hosts of Persia—the battle that saved Europe from the hordes of the then conquering Persians.

It is a poem peculiarly worthy of revival: it shows the mystic faith of the small army against the hosts of the invaders; it ascribes divine help to them in their struggle of the minority almost hopeless, yet given the victory.

Pheidippides, when asked to name the reward for this duty of the athlete's race for reinforcements to Sparta and back to Athens, requested leave to—

" 'Marry a certain maid I know keeps faith to the brave
 Hie to my house and home; and when my children shall
 creep
 Close to my knee—recount how the God was awful yet
 kind,
 Promised their sire reward to the full—rewarding him—so!'

But first he was bidden to call to praise
 When Persia was dust, all cried, 'To Akropolis!
 Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the much is thy due!
 Athens is saved, thank Pan, go shout.' He flung down his
 shield,
 Ran like fire once more . . .
 Till in he broke: 'Rejoice, we conquer!' Like wine
 through clay
 Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss!
 So to end gloriously—once to shout, thereafter be mute:
 'Athens is saved!' Pheidippides dies in the shout for his
 mood."

CHAPTER XIII

"DRAMATIC IDYLLS," SECOND SERIES

Legendary account of divine help to Greeks—Mystery of defeat of large army by small force of resisters—Ingratitude—England's reward for services—Pupils' ingratitude to master—Safeguarding a secret—Divulging it in heat of race—The influence of the moon upon human beings—Compassion in Greek mythology—Best soil for development of genius—Rock soil swept by sun and wind.

IN 1880 was published "*Dramatic Idylls*," Second Series, containing the Prologue; "*Echetlos*"; "*Clive*"; "*Mulýkeh*"; "*Pietro of Abano*"; "*Doctor*"; "*Pan and Luna*"; Epilogue.

In the poem "*Echetlos*" the subject is again the victory of the Athenians at Marathon; again, as in "*Pheidippides*," is presented the legendary account of supernatural reinforcement on the side of the Greeks. These legends of the Battle of Marathon are two of many which time produced to account for the mystery of the defeat of the Persian hosts seeking to conquer, attempting a comprehensive sweep westward, by the conclusive victory of Marathon, 490 B.C.

"*Echetlos*" is a poem relating to the Battle of Marathon, where the Athenians beat the Oriental hosts. It records the legend of a mysterious helper, a figure with a ploughshare, ever to be seen where the Athenian ranks were hardest pressed. They went to the Oracles and demanded to know the name of their mysterious helper; but the Oracles declined to tell: call him but *Echetlos*, the ploughshare wielder; let his deed be his name.

The poem of "*Clive*" deals with the well-known story

of Lord Clive, whose victorious service in India was afterwards criticised; he was impeached in consequence, but acquitted later of the charge. A year after his acquittal he committed suicide, his mind unhinged at the ingratitude of England to him after his services in India.

The poem deals with an episode in his life—a duel which he had to fight against a military bully who would have made him pay losses at cards to one who was known to have cheated. The other party to the loss paid up out of fear of the bully.

It is a stirring story of bravery and an amazing spirit of defiance in view of certain death if he repeated the defiance. The officer threw away his pistol in admiration of the valiant spirit of Clive.

The poem relates the feelings of Clive under the pistol of the bully. This, Browning adds, is what Clive might have felt—fear that he would not be taken at his word by the bully; to prove himself he would have had to turn his weapon on himself.

In order to vindicate a man's honour and courage, the duel was a part of the social machinery in Browning's time. He defends the practice in one of his letters to Miss Barrett in 1846.

“ Doctor ” is a poem, a Rabbinical study analogous to that of Job, and Satan's temptations. Satan here stands before God accusing Him with interfering with his plans on earth. He declares that he has found something even that raises a rival Hell on earth :

“ Death is the strongest-born of Hell, and yet
Stronger than Death is a bad wife, we know.”

God bids him go back to earth and marry, and contest death's claim with a bad wife. The poem is parable and paraphrase of human relations where Hell is raised—

where the Devil is worsted, and where the unknown Doctor who wins the victory is offered a wife by the grateful Emperor; but the Doctor refuses the snare.

“Muléykeh” is a poem which may be left as the obvious study of a man’s pride in his horse—a common love among the Bedouins, where the horse is companion and peculiar possession. This man Hóseyn’s horse Muléykeh is stolen from him; he alone knows the secret word to incite it to its full speed. The horse was stolen because he would not sell it, though the purchaser persisted. “I will not sell my Pearl,” he said to Duhl. But it is stolen. The new rider cannot escape from Hóseyn in pursuit: Pearl is in danger of being beaten. All the man’s pride in his Pearl sweeps over him. In rush of love for his Pearl, he shouts the magic pressure necessary to make her give out her speed and win the race: in so doing he lost his Pearl for ever, but so did he love her he could not bear to see her beaten.

So Hóseyn lost his Pearl, says the poem:

“And, lo in the sunrise, still sat Hóseyn upon the ground
Weeping. . . Pearl remained with the thief.

“And they jeered him one and all: ‘Poor Hóseyn is crazed
past hope!

How else had he wrought himself ruin? In fortune’s spite
To have simply held the tongue were a task for a boy or
girl

And be beaten in speed!’ Wept Hóseyn: ‘You never
have loved my Pearl!’”

Does this poem reflect a suspicion that in heat of discussion a secret might be divulged—in emulation for his subject a man might in argument easily give his secret away? Does it touch the curious problem of so voluble a talker, so invincible a mind as Browning’s, ever declining to speak in public or engage in argument for his faiths?

The trait of Browning of declining to speak in public is commented upon by biographers.

The poem of "Mulékkeh" was included by him in his own small selection.

"Pietro of Abano" is a poem with the theme of the ingratitude of disciples to their teacher after they have extracted his wisdom and feel equal to assimilating it for their own advantage. Pietro is a many-sided genius.

It is the story of unvarnished ingratitude of the disciple to the master who has parted with his wisdom to him. He has helped men of all kinds : all have prospered by his learning ; all turn a deaf ear to the master in his old age, from the humblest to the Pope himself ; all spurn Pietro, upon whom they have risen.

Pietro's disciples had Pietro's learning. Pietro had no love to teach ; the disciples had no love to respond with—learning without love. The rock of time leaves Pietro wrecked. Under this long traversing of Middle Ages lore, the moral is that man gets what he gives from his disciples ; the disciple cannot rise higher than the master.

"Pan and Luna" is a poem of Pan, the Greek god, and Luna, the Moon.

The Greek god Pan was the god of the huntsman and shepherds and inhabitants of the country. He was fabled as a monster, half man, half goat. The poem is a transcript of the legend of the Greeks to account for the eclipse of the Moon. The story of Pan and Luna interpreted by the poem is in its superstructure, above the old legend, a poetical presentment of the compassion of the Moon for Pan of the earth, reminiscent more of the legend of Endymion.

The Epilogue to "Dramatic Idylls," Second Series, is discussion of which soil produces the best genius : is it the

easy receptive, quickly fertile soil makes the best seed-plot, produces the phenomenon of human development called genius?

The poet answers no, that the real soil of genius is amid clefts beaten by sun and wind—rock soil, not the ready growth of prepared soil. The rock-nurtured pine-tree is emblematic of the growth of genius.

CHAPTER XIV

"JOCOSERIA"

Poems grave and gay — Deficiency — Mystic completion — Power of truth — Mystery of punishment and pain — Human ingratitude — Animal fidelity — Free love or marriage tie — Truth-compelling name of God — Betrayal of woman's love — Pioneer of freedom for women — Mary Wollstonecraft — Aim for women — Life — Conciliation of Society — Marriage — Wisdom of age — Intuition reasoned conviction — Spiritual light — Asceticism — Life's wheel — Limitations of intellectual seeing — Immortal hope.

IN 1883 Browning published a collection of poems styled "*Jocoseria*"; it contained: "Wanting is—What?"; "Donald"; "Solomon and Balkis"; "Adam, Lilith and Eve"; "Cristina and Monaldeschi"; "Ixion"; "Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli"; "Jochanan Hakkadosh"; "Pambo"; "Never the Time and the Place."

In a letter to a friend, along with an early copy of this work, the poet stated that "the title is taken from the work of Melander."

Melander, who was born in 1571, published a work called "*Joco-Seria*," because it was a collection of stories both grave and gay.

"Wanting is—What?" In the Prologue to "*Jocoseria*" is the solution of the deficiencies of life—what is wanting to perfect the human, says the poet.

What was wanting to the abundance of beauty around? What was wanting to the completion of the picture? The beams of light lit up but a blank: where is the comer to complete the incompleteness in the blue above? Still wanting is the aspiration that cannot be satisfied; still wanting is the ear that wants sound; wanting is the rose beauty

above, till from its air breathes the breath of completion,
and all grows life, grows love, grows love :

“ Come then, complete incompletion, O Comer,
Pant through the blueness, perfect the Summer !
Breathe but one breath
Rose beauty above,
And all that was death
Grows Life, grows Love,
Grows Love ! ”

“ Comer ” is the title for the Messiah—the Future One, He who shall come (Matt. xi. 3, xxi. 9 ; Luke vii. 19, 20 ; John, vi. 14, xi. 27, xii. 13).

“ At the second coming, when I come again,” said Christ at the Last Supper, “ I shall know you again ” ; and the recognition of the Comer, whom the old dispensation foreshadowed and prepared the minds of its prophets to see when it came, may be wanting : the Comer may come, and not be perceived ; the shepherd may be at the door, and the sheep know it not. Peter alone recognised the Comer in Jesus : “ Not of thyself did this arise,” said the Nazarene ; “ blessed art thou among men.” Upon the faith of Peter that Jesus was He who was to come, was Christianity to be built. To believe in Christ intellectually, to the believing in Him spiritually, is the gulf covered from Christian theology to the Christian mysticism of knowing the Comer.

The sense of life's incompleteness is man's salvation, says Browning, as well as his misery. In a world of beauty he longs for added beauty ; in a world of love he longs for further love ; in a world of light he longs for more light ; in a world of visible reactions he longs for heaven's invisible reaction from the blue : this, says Browning from first to last, is the hope of life.

“ Wanting is—What ? ” is one of the most mystic works of Browning's poetic art : it holds lines to conjure with.

The mystic's conception of life is of a continuous fabric, visible life merging into invisible life, earth's truths merg-

ing into Divine truths penetrated by the Divine light, by reflecting and abstracting Divine light, communicating with the Divine mystery by thought spiritually uplifted and expectant, with a spiritual organ to receive it by; and that there is a God in the blue in effect and reality, not in imagination and hope only. Such knowledge, realised in the whisper of Christ to the soul, gives life and joy: when Christ is felt in the blue as mystic Guide and Judge, it is the lifting of the soul of man alive to its immortal fate.

He who was to come, Christ, the mystic risen Christ, is a mystic fact that will work living results, said Browning also in the poem “A Death in the Desert”:

“I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it,
And has so far advanced thee to be wise.”

The poem of “Donald” also asks, “Wanting is—What?” What did Donald lack? It is a little poem that bites deep into the question of ingratitude, of common fairness, of simple justice, of the elementary rightness of “playing the game” by a creature that was helping another round a bad corner. In the story of Donald the man gave the fatal stab merely for love of sport. What was wanting in this man who could stab a creature from below who was imperilling its own safety for him? says the poem.

It is a story of base ingratitude. What did the man lack who could do this treacherous thing? It is said that the story lay in Browning’s memory from early life, but was not written out till many years later.

Browning was told once by Sir Edwin Landseer that he had come to the conclusion that the stag was the bravest of all animals.

“The stag is naturally timid. When pursued, its first impulse is to escape; but when turned to bay and flight is impossible, it fronts its enemies nobly, closes its eyes not

to see the terrible bloodshed, and with its branching horns steadily tosses dog after dog, one upon the other, until overpowered by numbers it sinks to its death."—" *Sir Edwin Landseer*," by James A. Manson.

Landseer's stag pictures are among the best-known of his works. It may or it may not have been from Landseer that Browning used the stag in several of his poems to illustrate some quality of nobility, as here in the poem of "Donald," and in "Fifine-at-the-Fair," it is designation for man himself. Man, the lordly stag, it was necessary to hunt warily—necessary to assume a disguise and stifle in mediocrities to approach.

The poem "Solomon and Balkis" relates the visit of the Queen of Sheba. They sit on Solomon's ivory throne, and talk of mysteries and sublimities. The Queen seeks to prove the King's wisdom by hard questioning. He humiliates her by turning her questions to childishness. He takes the spirit out of her, but she gathers her wits together for one more question. They bandy words, and in the process the Queen jostles Solomon's hand, which has his truth-compelling ring upon it, the ring bearing the "Name" which as it turned compelled truth to give itself up. It turned upon himself and his true nature, broke into vituperation of her; in revenge he turns the "Name" upon her, and gets the sordid reality of her desires from her. She has grown tired of wisdom, she says: would play the woman, forget Solomon the wisdom-monger and find Solomon the man.

The truth-compelling ring of Solomon with the "Name" engraved upon it is used as simile for the magic builders' master in the poem "Abt Vogler," the ring of Solomon with "God" engraved upon it.

"Cristina and Monaldeschi" is a poem around the facts of the story of Queen Cristina of Sweden, who was

brilliantly accomplished and highly educated. She decided not to marry, and abdicated her claim to her father's throne in favour of a cousin. She renounced the Protestant religion and publicly embraced the Catholic Church. The officers of her household were all Italian: among them was the Marquis Monaldeschi, to whom Cristina abandoned herself, who proved a traitor and a scoundrel, and, wearying of his royal mistress, sought new attractions. The farewell of Cristina and Monaldeschi forms the poem; it relates the reasons of her disillusion—letters betrayed, her love made a jest, his letters exhibiting her in ridicule to his new love. She was maddened and plotted the death of Monaldeschi, convicting him to his end by his own words, spoken lightly when love was above suspicion.

What does the man deserve who betrays a woman's love? Instant death, said the Court; “it would be act of justice.”

So his words rose against him. Cristina had him stabbed to death. She was compelled to leave France, and retired to Rome, dying there on April 19th, 1869. (From “*Browning Cyclopædia*,” Dr. Berdoe.)

“*Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli*” is presentment of Mary Wollstonecraft, the pioneer of the movement for Woman's Rights. She was born in 1759. She had large mental powers and bold ideas about women much in advance of the times. She was energetic in spirit, and struck out to be a “woman of a new genius” (letter to her sister, 1788).

“I tremble at my attempt for the freedom of women,” she wrote, “yet if I fail I only suffer. Freedom, even uncertain freedom, is dear. I am not born to tread the beaten track; the peculiar bent of my nature pushes me on.”

Her first piece of literary work was a pamphlet entitled “*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*.”

She was employed as literary adviser to the publisher of her pamphlet, at whose house she met notable people : here she met the author William Godwin and Henry Fuseli.

She set out to attack the established order of Society, and sympathised with the French Revolution, denounced the Lords and Commons, and the clergy, and the game laws of England. Her best-known book was "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman." She believed the women of her time were fools, and the men kept them in ignorance that they might retain their authority over them : her idea was that men kept women as slaves or playthings.

She became greatly interested in Fuseli, who did not reciprocate the interest, but was annoyed instead. He was a married man, and though her love was first confessed as merely platonic, it assumed human character later. She wrote persistently to Fuseli, and suggested to Mrs. Fuseli that she might become an inmate of their house. Finding her appeals in vain, she went to Paris and lived with Gilbert Imlay, without taking what she called the vulgar precaution of marriage. Shortly after the alliance Imlay deserted her. She followed him to London, and attempted to commit suicide, throwing herself from Putney Bridge, but was rescued. She again met William Godwin : still she would not bind herself by "the vulgar precaution" of marriage, and they lived together for a time, but ultimately conciliated Society by being married. She left two children : one, the daughter of Godwin, became the second wife of Shelley ; the other, the daughter of Imlay, after a tragic life put an end to herself. In recalling her life, this poem asks the question of the "Jocoseria" series—"Wanting is—What?" in Mary Wollstonecraft's life.

The poem "Adam, Lilith and Eve" is the story of a man, Adam, and two women, Lilith and Eve. Lilith is accredited in Old Testament Commentaries as having been

wife to Adam before Eve. Lilith was the supposed mother of demoniacal beings, leaving Adam, for whom Eve was then created. The poem merely takes the names, and love situation of one man and two women. The women, frightened by a thunderstorm, begin to confess their natures; when the storm is over they retract the words. The man assumes it to be a joke, as the easiest way out of the threatened discomfort aroused by the confessions of the women.

“Jochanan Hakkadosh” is a tale imputed to an old Hebrew work, the title of which was: “Collection of many fables, and from Moses to Moses there was never one like Moses.”

Hakkadosh means “The Holy”; on account of his holy living he was surnamed Rabbenu Hakkadosh. The poem represents Rabbenu Hakkadosh with old age overtaking him, and his scholars begging for final words of wisdom from the dying Rabbi. One asks if he regrets his youth: a long philosophising succeeds from the dying Rabbi.

This focusses thoughts of many of Browning’s poems that a Rabbi would inevitably tend to; he relates in an allegory how he came by his intuitions and wisdom in the first place.

The poem is a pronouncement of spiritual seeing and wisdom. Faith and love are colours of the spectrum of truth, of the pure white light. Man’s first business in life is to learn to love, whether loved in return matters not: “loving” is a matter of first principle to the lover only; love is the law out of which results arise.

“Pambo” is a poem relating to the legend of an old monk, simple and unlearned, who went for education to St. Antony. He was given the first verse of the thirty-ninth Psalm: “I said, I will take heed unto my ways,

that I offend not with my tongue." That verse, he said, was enough for him if he could learn it as he ought. After nineteen years he asserted on enquiry that he was still learning it.

The poem traverses the asceticism enjoined upon holy men of old: their penances, their mortification, their fastings, their means of governing the body's appetites and passions. To Pambo was given a verse which he translated to himself as meaning the necessity of keeping perpetual silence. The poem mirrors the ideals of holy men of medieval times; it is half jocular, and turns the story to personalities between the poet and the critics. "I, too," says the poet, "am like Pambo."

The poem of "Ixion" has for framework Ixion of Greek mythology, who, according to its legend, was chained to a wheel incessantly turning, for having treacherously abused the hospitality of Heaven, which had taken pity on him when earth refused to because of crimes committed there. Ixion is condemned to eternal punishment on the revolving wheel, and the poem presents him as defying Zeus.

"Ixion," the poem, presents the difficult question of punishment and pain, and the justice of God, as it looks to those bound on the wheel of life. Above it all is the rainbow—product of the vapour of suffering and the light of heaven—the rainbow with its covenant of hope.

The poem is presentment of the old Greek limitation of spiritual upreach. Zeus was god of retribution to the classic mind—power without love—eternal punishment the due of man's failures on earth. The poem rises to the thought of something above, a Potency, something not yet seen but divinely discerned, by Ixion on his wheel. He believes that Zeus is not final in godship. He looks at the rainbow from his torturing wheel; he imagines something beyond this tyrant; he will, like Caliban on Setebos,

look beyond up to the Quiet. Caliban's dam told him of this, but Ixion divines for himself that this punishment is not the final word: he will defy this Zeus and trust the Potency above:

“Thither I rise, whilst thou—Zeus, keep thy godship and sink.”

As Ixion, bound to his wheel, saw the rainbow—

“Hell's sad triumph suspended,
Born of my tears, sweat, blood,”

—there rises the conception of hope beyond—that there the future “justifies, glorifies pain.” So, says Ixion, though in torture.

It is this message of hope in a future life to retrieve the failures of the present, that Browning's poems would affirm to mankind. He thus hoped, he says in “La Saisiaz”: he would ask others to hope with him. Much of his poetry is a plea for the immortal hope.

In many poems he pictures the arising of a new concept to meet a crisis in which new truth is grasped!

When a situation is encountered which old ideas are unable to cope with, when the mind is confronted with a situation which reveals deficiencies in adaptation, between the needs of the individual and the concepts of the mind to grapple with them, new concepts are gained in response to felt deficiencies in our existing stock of ideas to meet them. The general statement remains that our new concepts arise out of the inadequacy of those already on hand to cope with the condition in which we find ourselves. Out of the acute mental pain, of a desire to help those loved, arise concepts which give new hypotheses and new conceptional activity; new concepts arise formed by fusion of old ideas with new sudden light upon them (“Saul”).

In spiritual sloth, mental strain, or old age, concepts petrify and cease to aggregate as no new demands, no radically new demands, are made upon them: when new

concepts cease to arise and old ones are inadequate, the dogmatism of mental stagnation begins. Ixion on the wheel of life looked beyond, in his pain, and saw hope. So, says Browning, trust pain—that what seems malevolent is really benevolent in purpose.

“ Strive, mankind, though strife endure, through endless
obstruction
Stage after stage, each rise marred by as certain a fall ! ”

“ Baffled forever—yet never so baffled but e'en in the
baffling
Whatsoever the medium, flesh or essence—Ixion's
Made for a purpose of hate—clothing the entity Thou. ”

“ What is the influence, high o'er Hell, that turns to a
rapture,
Pain and despair's murk mist blends in a rainbow of hope?
What is beyond the obstruction, stage by stage tho' it
baffle
Back must I fall, confess, ' Ever the weakness I fled
No, for beyond, far, far in a Purity all unobstructed,
Zeus was Zeus—not man: wrecked by his weakness I
whirl,
Out of the wreck I rise—past Zeus to the Potency above. ’ ”

CHAPTER XV

“*FERISHTAH'S FANCIES*”

Philosophy and wisdom of Browning embodied—Focussing of past faiths without dramatic disguise—Contents singing—Seasoning bread of life—Symbolisms—Vision—Intuition—Light—Love—Spiritual aids—Prayer—Gratitude—God above—God on earth—Fire and flint—Man to God—Like attracts like—Self-expression—Purpose of pain—Knowledge a means—Faith result of personal experience—Browning's habit of attending Bedford Chapel, Paddington, with his sister-in-law—Contributed introduction to selection of sermons of Rev. Thomas Jones.

In 1884 appeared “*Ferishtah's Fancies*.”

“*Ferishtah's Fancies*” is a collection of short utterances embodying the soul and mind of Browning. Here the wisdom of his past work is crystallised, and he is in serious intent to focus the fruit of his feeling and thinking into an imaginative expression of his philosophy of calm and assured satisfaction, and that the way of God to man is to be accepted in a reasoned faith, founded upon the Hebrew and Persian conception of God. A prefatory note says there was no Persian poet of that name, the stories are inventions.

In a letter to a friend, Browning explained his work, disengaging it from a slavish reference to past fable or particular philosophy :

“I hope and believe that one or two careful readings of the poem will make its sense clear enough—above all, pray allow for the poet's inventiveness in any case, and do not suppose there is more than a thin disguise of a few Persian names and allusions. There was no such poet as *Ferishtah*—the stories are all inventions—the Hebrew quotations are put in for a purpose, as direct acknowledgment that certain

doctrines may be found in the Old Book which the concocters of novel schools of morality put forth as discoveries of their own."

The Prologue to "Ferishtah's Fancies" describes the method of the construction of each poem it contains. Ortolan is the bird stuck on a skewer with a piece of toast and leaf of sage between, under which imagery the poem is dished up to the palate of the reader—the bird representing song, with Bread, the staff of life, and Herb, the seasoning of wisdom: so, in the twelve poems comprising the series, says the poet in explanatory Prologue, see the fancy, the word, and the song strung, which it is suggested should be taken together as the delicacy described is eaten in Italy, bird, crust, and herb seasoning in conjunction. The ortolan is a small bird forced into fatness in the dark, much prized by gourmands of the country.

The series "Ferishtah's Fancies" contained: "The Eagle"; "Melon Seller"; "Shah Abbas"; "The Family"; "The Sun"; "Mihrab Shah"; "A Camel Driver"; "Two Camels"; "Cherries"; "Plot Culture"; "A Pillar at Sebzevah"; "A Bean-Stripe"; also "Apple-Eating"; "Epilogue."

The first poem, "The Eagle," has for foundation an Eastern fable pointing the conclusion that success is effect of cause; that food does not drop fortuitously into the mouth; that the idle and lazy life, waiting for Providence to support it, is destined to disappointment; that as effects follow causes, the starvation of the individual affects the general welfare; that the starvation and disuse of soul and barren introspection, are a moral and philosophical evading of human and divine purpose—so thinks Ferishtah.

Ferishtah confesses that he is learning to be a dervish; his business is to feed hungry souls. How pursue his ideal except by going about up and down amid men, by speaking as from God to the soul, linking the Divine principle

underlying the personality, even of the squalid, hateful, and harsh?

Ferishtah justifies incidentally his poet way with man, as he would justify the God way with human life and circumstances.

The eagle as symbol is frequent in Browning’s work for vision and intuitive knowledge. In this poem of “ The Eagle,” Browning divulges how the altruistic idea of the duty of service to the race superimposed itself upon his first egoistic dream of selfish individualism. It was in the nature of a miracle, he confesses, and though a dream-like experience, he learned the secret of the limitation of God’s power on earth : how faith arose in him that God’s workings in life are lost without man’s co-operation, as a beam of light passes as black darkness unless intercepted and reflected by refrangible objects into prismatic parts. To be reflectors and distributors of the Divine beams is the province of the soul and necessary to its existence ; and by the prime law of Love-secrecy, the soul seeks concealment ; and effacing his own soul by taking the hue of another, is Nature’s trick, assumed by the soul, by which it evades destruction by its enemies. So the lyric exquisite follows :

“ Round us the wild creatures, overhead the trees,
Underfoot the moss-tracks,—life and love with these ! ”

“ The Melon Seller ” is the second confession of Ferishtah of his lessons learned by the way. It presents the picture of a beggar who, after years of the favour of fortune, fell from grace by personal default, and received a just punishment for his breaking of the law. The beggar stoically accepts his punishment in set-off to the years of favour ; exclaimed, in the words of Job : “ Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and evil not receive ? ” There is so much undeserved bliss given to man, says the lyric, that a balance of apparent injustice seems needed to bring the scales true,

"Shah Abbas" assumes the Persian atmosphere for exhibition of the emotion of belief. Ferishtah has been questioned by a pupil upon the traditional, upon a life supposed to have been lived. What can be believed, asked the pupil, when testimony conflicts?

Ready acquiescence accepts the death bequest, belief awaits confirmation, is rewarded for walking in the light of truth and love for confirmation of its faith.

Love as the lamp of the mind, the lighting up of the mind by truth, is likened in the lyric of "Shah Abbas" as the difference between a room in darkness where the furniture is known only as troublesome obstacles, and the same room with the lamp lit.

In "A Camel Driver"—as in "Ixion," one of the "Joscoseria" series—the idea of eternal punishment for human misdeeds is faced. In a future life all earth's social systems vanish; conditions after death must be different, and punishment is probably blank ignorance of Heaven, which is Hell itself. Not to know his relation to God, is man's Hell, and condemns the soul to the darkness and extinction it chooses on earth.

In "Two Camels" the practice of mortifying the flesh and its desires, as assistance to the growth of spirituality, is held to be untenable. To use talents is prime principle for their increase and continuance. If God gave man capacity for joy, He may be trusted to have had some purpose in it that the ascetic loses. In the succeeding lyric, the idea of the moment of bliss becoming the Heaven of Eternity is re-expressed from "A Last Ride Together."

Action, even with the smallest result, is the advice in "Cherries." The chief thing is to act, as affirmed in "The Statue and the Bust," the prime sin of Nature being the unlit lamp, the ungirt loin :

"To do little is bad, to do nothing is worse."

In “The Family” the problem of prayer is faced. Why ask God for anything?—as if man knew better than God what is good for him. If God is all-loving and all-giving, He should need no asking, and man’s petitions are an offence to His Omnipotence.

Man prays, says the poem, because it is one of those truths of the most primitive instincts of soul, and prayer has some deep purpose beyond the hope of bringing something desired by human longing. Let man pray, even with an ignorant aim, and God will turn the prayer to the purpose it is called to perform in man’s development, by God, who knows what the turning of the mind in prayer to the power above him really is. Prayer is not designed for worldly gain, or even comfort, but for some deep purpose of God in relation to the further evolution of man. Prayer is faith in action, and is the prime achievement of the human mind.

Gratitude, he says, in “A Bean-Stripe,” is an instinct of even the brute creation, and the presumption holds that there is a Being to be grateful to.

In the poem “The Family,” the question of the lawfulness of prayer is illustrated. Ferishtah has prayed that a dying man may recover. Why, says a questioner, do this? If God, the all-wise, has willed the man to die—what God decides must be the only will.

Ferishtah replies in a fable. Four conflicting opinions rise round the dying bed of a certain woman bitten by a serpent. Human reason must exercise itself round these matters, says the poem; man must exercise hope and love and a calling upon God’s help, so long as human being is human being, when angelic sight is given the wide vision. For human sight trust human conditions, and act up to the best human means with a fear and trembling, faith and hope, that the will of man may also be the will of God moved to response, by the human urgency to save human life. In this combination of the doctor’s skill, the father’s faith in him, the humanity, the simple acqui-

escence, the current wisdom of the youngest son, united in desire to save the life of the mother—the family gathered to save may be the will of God.

“The Sun” is presentment of the Divine tradition that God once assumed a human shape on earth. A pupil asks of Ferishtah what he has to say about so strange an idea.

Ferishtah replies in allegory, drawn from the worship of the Sun of primitive peoples: days when men believed the Sun to be God, and in response to their blessings the far-away ball of fire conferred it as God upon earth—the blessings of warmth, the easy enjoyments of the soil. Men looked up and worshipped the Sun as author of its blessings: in response human hearts rose in natural thanks and worship to its power. How can human response touch the force above it? What heeds this force of the emotion of worship below it? Can there be no like answering affinity to the power it attracts?

No, says the poem, like can only attract like, the soul can only respond to soul: how import this attractive force to the source of man’s worship? says Ferishtah, in reply to his pupil. There is something here before which man’s intelligence stands helpless. He relates the mystic origin of fire on earth—fire unknown till flint accidentally, perhaps, struck stone: it was always there; it assumed Divine aspect when discovered; the cult of fire-worshipping arose. So, says the lyric, the fire of God is in the flint of man’s soul—so God incarnates in man. It is hard for the flint heart to realise the spark it is capable of realising.

This personality of God is deducible from the personality of man—the mind to form purposes and direct actions with, from the purpose and will-power of man.

In “Ferishtah’s Fancies,” with but the slightest rag of the old drapery of concealment, Browning touched the deep problems of spiritual life: the purpose of pain, in “Mihrah Shah”; “Plot Culture,” the problem of self-expression, the worthlessness of knowledge as an end in

itself without the inspiration of love; “ A Bean-Stripe ” and “ Apple-Eating,” reaffirming the great faiths of “ Rabbi Ben Ezra ” and “ La Saisiaz ”—confession that they are results of personal experience, and must not necessarily be held good for all minds.

In 1884 Browning contributed an Introduction to a selection of the sermons of the Rev. Thomas Jones. With his sister-in-law, Miss Arabella Barrett, he attended the services of Bedford Chapel, Paddington, to hear Mr. Jones, who was known as the Welsh poet-preacher.

He recalled his attendances at Bedford Chapel with his sister-in-law, the visits to the vestry afterwards, where he found the preacher “ still suffused with the thought and passion of the last hour.”

Of the sermons he heard then, he wrote :

“ True gold will be discerned there by the worthy assayer I do not doubt; that it glittered once I seem bound to gratefully say, should there be any care for the impressions received more than fifteen years ago.”

CHAPTER XVI

"PARLEYINGS WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE IN THEIR DAY"

Problems of the whirligig of time—People important in their day unimportant in later times—Poem examines lives for reason of this—Greek myth of Apollo—Test of life—Smart's masterpiece never repeated—Poetic genius—Political importance—Music's influence on mind and soul of man—Objective and subjective art—Ironic advice—How to gain present-day importance—True saintliness—The mystic or humanitarian—World's resistance to new ideas—Invention—Faith—Leverage for success—Fearful of evil out of good—Freedom or licence.

IN 1887 appeared "*Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day*"—to wit: "*Bernard de Mandeville*"; "*Daniel Bartoli*"; "*Christopher Smart*"; "*George Bubb Doddington*"; "*Francis Furini*"; "*Gérard de Lairese*"; and "*Charles Avison*"—introduced by a dialogue between "*Apollo and the Fates*"; concluded by another between "*Fust and his Friends*." It carries the dedication: "*In Memoriam, J. Milsand. Died 1886.*"

The Prologue to this series is with certain mythical personages of Ancient Greece—Apollo, the Sun God, and the three Fates; the period of heroic story when the gods talked together on the slopes of Parnassus.

The connection of this Prologue with the series of "*Parleyings*" to follow is not readily seen: it belongs to the Greek story told in "*Balaustion's Adventure*"; it is again Browning's toll from Greek lore as subject through which to express himself. The young Sordello is pictured as learning the song of Apollo in his lonely childhood: Sordello dreamed his dream of Apollo. It is to Apollo,

the Sun God of the Greeks, that Browning's art again turned in the decline of life. Apollo, in the poem, has fallen upon adverse fate. The poem is a relating of the story of Apollo bound to the employment of earth, as punishment for having offended Jupiter : he became the servant of Admetus, at a period before the poem pictures, but now, having served his term of banishment, Apollo is restored to heaven and his god-like duties. But having heard that his old master and friend Admetus is dying, he determines to descend upon Parnassus and visit the abode of the Fates—the three who presided there over the destinies of mankind—to plead for the life of his former master Admetus.

The Fates declare against Apollo ; he is bidden return to earth and wake it from its dreams. Apollo begs at least that his friend may reach the prescribed span of life : the Fates proffer the opinion that Admetus may not wish his life prolonged.

This dialogue between Apollo and the Fates traverses the problem of the worth of life, the value of the influences of the gods, the question of the Sun's glory, and the glory that the disciples of Bacchus enjoy—Bacchus has compensation failing Apollo. The transforming quality of love may alone avert the fate of Admetus, if human love, sufficient for the sacrifice of itself for another, can be found. The fate of Admetus is left in doubt at the conclusion of the colloquy ; but in the poem “ Balaustion's Adventure ” this saving love is the theme of “ Alcestis,” which Browning incorporated with his story of “ Balaustion's Adventure,” to which the poem “ Apollo and the Fates ” is the natural introduction.

Bernard de Mandeville, the subject of the first “ Parley,” was important in his day (1670-1733), son of a physician of Rotterdam. He also studied medicine at Leyden, crossing to England to learn the English language : so well did he succeed, that doubt of his being a

foreigner arose. He practised medicine in London, and became important in his day by his book "The Fable of the Bees." He wrote humorously on Society topics of the time, likened it to the time; propounded certain aphorisms given in the poem, and whimsically upheld a topsy-turvy philosophy that "private vices are public benefits—that self-seeking, luxury, ambition, greed, are necessary to the greatness and prosperity of the nation—fools only strive to make a great and honest hive"; and propounded other forms of paradoxical wisdom.

The poem recalls these bygone utterances, and displays the hidden wisdom of some of them. It is a plea for compromise with absolute perfection, the compromise of the ideal with the actual, to make workable stuff of life: to make the best use of what is, rather than sigh vainly for perfection in the absolute.

Daniel Bartoli was a learned Jesuit, born at Ferrara in 1608, dying at Rome in 1685. His claim to fame in his day was a history of his Order, drawn from facts in the records of the Vatican, from English colleges, or from memoirs sent by friends. This history contained stories of miracles in the upbuilding of the faith of Rome.

The poem is something of a reply to the legendary matter of the book; it begs leave to relate a story of saintliness which is plain fact. This story of saintliness is the matter of the poem: it is relation of a crisis in the life of a woman, and how she stood the test; how a man's devotion failed the test, but he turned a saint, such as those Bartoli wrote of. Which was the real saint—the woman who died, or the man who lived to profess the conventional saintly way of the Church? asks the poem.

Success or failure in responding to the tests of life is frequent theme in Browning's art—the crucial moment:

"Be hate that fruit or love that fruit,
It forwards the general deed of man."

By the Fireside.

Christopher Smart was a person of importance in his day ; friend of Johnson, writer and Bohemian, of note in his lifetime as producer of second-rate poetry, succumbing to intemperate habits, but filled with curiosity and belief in the soul—the “ poor Kit Smart ” of Johnson’s story, whose questioning went directly to the state of the soul. He was under restraint as one of unsound mind, and while in confinement wrote the poem which Browning alludes to, “ The Song of David,” which proved to be a treasure of high poetic, and eminent religious worth ; the story of David’s extolling of God, and sustained praise of His work.

How did this happen, says the poem, that once and once only Christopher Smart’s genius reached this higher watermark—but once? Browning illustrates the subject in a simile : he imagines someone exploring a house, finding all ordinary and unnoticeable, till suddenly one door opened into a chapel which was “ Art’s response to Earth’s despair.” Why was there only one such room in Christopher Smart’s house of life? What drew the veil over his genius, or what caused that one catching up into heaven?

George Bubb Doddington, person of importance in his day, was Member of Parliament, Envoy to Madrid, man of good estate by inheritance, poetaster of great men ; his career full of political vicissitudes of a discreditable kind, by which he secured political prizes, and received a title, becoming Lord Melcombe. He was the friend of distinguished men, and written about by Pope and Churchill.

The poem satirises the life of this person of importance in his day ; it traverses the life of the notable man, and offers advice in the management of men ; it voices sentiments regarding mankind akin to those of the cynic, and provides the recipe for achieving worldly success and the admiration of men. It is a poem of the inverted humour of Browning, a satire on the world, and his advice to those

who would be of importance in their day : half a joke, as the saying is, but very much in earnest, in its satire on the time-server and sycophant.

Francis Furini was a Florentine, born in 1600 ; a painter who took Orders and became an exemplary parish priest. In his art he excelled in the nude ; in later life he repented those presentations of it, and ordered them to be destroyed.

The poem deals with his subject as painter of the nude ; it is a plea for the nude, made more than once by Browning—a plea for presentment artistically of “the dear Fleshly perfection of the human shape.” The poem is a rounded utterance upon art, and expression and defence of the nude : a defence of that purity of thought of the artist, as against the common mind, which some would assert is unequal to contemplation of pure form and colour divorced from fleshly uses. This poem and the repentance of Francis Furini for his early work provide, like many of Browning’s poems, moral problems that the soul alone can solve for itself.

Gérard de Lairese, a person of importance in his day (1640), was a Flemish painter. He was a precocious genius, producing portraits and historical pictures at the age of fifteen. He was greatly admired by the Dutch, and was notable as art teacher and writer on the art of painting. His ideas came to him while playing the violin ; he derived inspiration from the music.

The poem is pronouncement by Browning upon the question of objective and subjective art—the artist of the obvious, and the artist of the illimitable beyond the obvious. Is the sight of the objective artist sealed to the invisible that the subjective artist’s fancies busy themselves with ? It is possible for art to be both objective and subjective, but the artist dedicated to the subjective has to leave the objective as of less value ; in the limitation of

time for himself he has to let the objective beauties of Nature pass unsung. Give him two lives he could have written in two forms, but soul's compulsion compels its truths to be artistically used first. He traverses the old painters' methods, exhibiting how faithfully he, too, could have walked with Natural beauty in the conclusion.

The poem “Gérard de Lairese” places poetically the view on the objective and subjective in art and poetry that Browning expressed on the subject of his *Essay on Shelley*; to the objective aim he replies in this poem of “Gérard de Lairese”:

“If we no longer see as you of old,
 'Tis we see deeper. Progress for the bold!
 You saw the body, 'tis the soul we see.
 Try now! Bear witness while you walk with me.
 I see as you: if we loose arms, stop pace,
 'Tis that you stand still, I conclude the race
 Without your company.”

Charles Avison was a musician of importance in his day, born in Newcastle about 1710. He studied in Italy, returning to be organist at Newcastle. He wrote an “*Essay on Musical Expression*,” which placed French and Italian schools of music above the German, contrary to the musical opinion of the day. This led to controversy which gave him prominence.

The poem is criticism of music with respect to its influence on the mind. Music was inspiration to Browning; he was a good exponent of music on piano and organ himself. Many of his best moments came to him through music, he asserted; the poem places his faith that—

“There is no truer truth obtainable
 By man than comes by music.”

Beneath mind, says the poem, is the unsounded sea of soul from which music evokes feeling which emerges through the mind in flowers of thought:

“Who tells of tracks to source the founts of Soul.”

To feel and to know is mind's highest conjunction. Music dredges deep, and draws to light treasures from the soul, says the poem. In the poem Browning pays tribute to his early music-master, John Relfe.

"Fust and his Friends" is the Epilogue to this series, "Parleyings." It relates an episode in the life of Johann Fust, who was considered to have invented the art of printing, and certain monks who, having heard the report of his marvels, have decided that he must have made a compact with the devil; so, being in danger of losing his soul, these friends have come to Fust to exorcise Satan and restore their friend to his senses, but so ignorant and forgetful are they, that they cannot hit upon the right formula for the occasion.

The inventor is depressed—something fails in his idea, apparently, it won't work. But suddenly, as the monks argue, the master idea comes; and, invoking aid from Archimedes, who had said, "Give me a place to stand on, and I could move the world," Fust runs to his printing room and returns with the exorcising Psalm that the monks could not remember, written on the paper.

Fust is overwhelmed with joy at the success of his machine at last. He explains the process to the monks, who now see there was no miracle. But they dread the discovery and doubt its value—it will do as much harm as good, they think. Fust defends the value of his discovery as of great future good, even if bad incidentally results also.

In 1887 Browning removed from Warwick Crescent to De Vere Gardens, Kensington.

"He had for several years been preparing for a more roomy dwelling, says Mrs. Orr, and handsome pieces of old furniture had been stowed away at Warwick Crescent.

. . . This summer he merely went to St. Moritz; he was determined to give the London winter a fuller trial in the more promising circumstances of his life.

“ During this winter of 1887-88 his friends first perceived that a change had come over him, that his life was drawing to a close; it was difficult to do so when so much of the former elasticity remained; when he still proclaimed himself ‘ quite well,’ so long as he was not definitely suffering. But he was often suffering; one terrible cold followed another . . . but he made no distinct change in his mode of life. He still dined out: still attended the private view of every, or almost every, art exhibition. He kept up his unceasing correspondence—in one or two cases voluntarily added to it.

“ Soon after his final return to England, while he still lived in comparative seclusion, certain habits of friendly intercourse, often superficial but always binding, had rooted themselves in his life—he could rise early and go to bed late and occupy every hour of the day with work or pleasure. . . . ”

CHAPTER XVII

"SONNET TO EDWARD FITZGERALD"

Browning's grief and indignation on reading Edward Fitzgerald's published opinion of Mrs. Browning—Replies with sonnet expressing his rage and contempt—Philosophy of Browning probably spur to rage—Irreconcilable points of view between Browning and Fitzgerald—Professor Cowell's view of "The Rubáiyát" opposed to Fitzgerald's translation—Mysticism or wine—Seer or sensualist.

A "SONNET to Edward Fitzgerald" was published in the *Athenæum* of July 13th, 1889 :

"TO EDWARD FITZGERALD.

"I chanced upon a new book yesterday;
I opened it, and where my finger lay
'Twixt page and uncut page, these words I read—
Some six or seven at most—and learned thereby
That you, Fitzgerald, whom by ear and eye
She never knew, 'thanked God my wife was dead.'
Ay, dead! and were yourself alive, good Fitz,
How to return you thanks would task my wits.
Kicking you seems the common lot of curs—
While more appropriate greeting lends you grace,
Surely to spit there glorifies your face—
Spitting from lips once sanctified by hers.

"ROBERT BROWNING.

"*July 8th, 1889.*"

The Sonnet was not included in Browning's subsequent published work, "Asolando"; he died five months after its publication.

The "Sonnet to Edward Fitzgerald" was called forth in a rage of indignation by Browning, against some words of Fitzgerald which were reported in a newspaper and caused the bitter expressions of the Sonnet.

When Mrs. Browning's death was reported, Fitzgerald wrote :

“ Mrs. Browning's death is rather a relief to me, I must say ; there will be no more ‘ Aurora Leighs,’ thank God ! A woman of real genius, I know ; but what is the upshot of it all ? She and her sex had better mind the kitchen and the children, and perhaps the poor. Except in such things as little novels they only devote themselves to what men do much better, leaving that which men do worse or not at all.”

Browning's savage Sonnet dealt a blow for his outraged affections, and his wife's defiled personality as artist and woman.

In the Sonnet to Fitzgerald, Browning gave vent, probably, to a suppressed indignation ; the cult of Omar Khayyám, as translated by Fitzgerald, could not but be repugnant to Browning the mystic.

The translation of “ The Rubáiyát ” by Fitzgerald is one of the ironies of life. The attention of Fitzgerald was drawn to the poem by Professor Cowell ; they discussed the question of translating it into English. The result was so totally different an interpretation by Fitzgerald to Professor Cowell's interpretation of the poem's myticisms and the personality of the Persian mystic, Omar Khayyám, that a protest was laid against it.

In the “ Life of Edward Fitzgerald,” by Thomas Wright, the view of Professor Cowell is presented. Where Fitzgerald saw agnosticism, and translated buffoonery to the credit of the Sufi, Professor Cowell saw Omar a mystic and the mystic's doctrine of the spiritual intoxication of Divine truth. Mr. Wright relates his conversations with Professor Cowell concerning the publication of “ The Rubáiyát ” that he came upon in the Bodleian Library, and so enthusiastically drew Fitzgerald's attention to. Mr. Wright records :

“ When I visited Cambridge in November, 1901, I was able to hear Professor Cowell's opinions from his own lips :

'Are we,' I said, 'to take Omar's words literally or is there a hidden meaning?'

"The poem," he replied, 'is mystical. I am convinced of it. When in India, I had many conversations with the Moonshes on the subject, and they were all of this opinion. They ridiculed the idea that the poem is allegorical.'

"Omar's laudation of drunkenness," said I, 'is difficult to explain away.'

"By drunkenness," said Professor Cowell, with a smile, 'is meant Divine Love.'

"But if his laudation of drunkenness is a difficulty, still more must we regret some of the expressions he uses towards the Deity.'

"They merely illustrate," observed Professor Cowell, 'Omar's disbelief in the Mahometan heaven and hell. He ridicules the very orthodox Pharisees among the Mahomedans with their strict observation of minutiae.'

"Then," said I, 'what it all means is this: Trouble not your head about the rewards of Heaven or the pains of Hell, as understood by the Mahomedans; live a right life and never cease to trust in the goodness of God!'

"It is so.'

"But Fitzgerald did not agree with you?"

"Sometimes he inclined to this belief, though generally not. He could never quite make up his mind.'

"As for the remark made," says this biographer, "that readers care for but one Omar, and his real name is Fitzgerald—that, if true, says little for the reader's intelligence now that the complete Omar is accessible to all."

The stormy side of Browning's soul was ever well kept in hand. The outbreak in the Sonnet recalls his fiery rage at Forster, who had insulted a woman's name in the poet's hearing (diary of Macready). Except in these two cases, his indignation is only discernible in his art. If you would get the true, strong product of a man, set him to hate a little, he says in "*Fifine-at-the-Fair*." Indignation graved some of his greatest work. Protest was his atmosphere, constructive art was his instrument; but in this "*Sonnet to Edward Fitzgerald*," for once the destructive tool was used, and the smouldering anger flamed skywards.

CHAPTER XVIII

"ASOLANDO"

Last collection of poems of Browning—Written at new home, De Vere Gardens, Kensington—Dedicated to American lady—Remembrance of her hospitality at Asolo, in Italy—Browning's love of Asolo—Uprise of his genius—Vision and voice—Love of Nature—Memories of young love—Lure of uncertainty—Intoxication of young girl's love—Value of human love—Witchcraft of love—Love and hate, white and black magic—Loss of love—Tyranny of love—Spiritual love—Art—Misconceptions—Death in perfection—Personal utterances of development—Truth through illusion—Whole truth divined, love at heart of power—Completion of life by death—Browning's death—Interment in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey.

ON December 12th, 1889—the day Browning died—was published "*Asolando : Fancies and Facts.*" It is dedicated to Mrs. Arthur Bronson :

"To whom but you, dear Friend, should I dedicate verses—some few written, all of them supervised, in the comfort of your presence, and with yet another experience of the gracious hospitality now bestowed on me since so many a year—adding a charm even to my residences at Venice, and leaving me little to regret for the surprise and delight at my visits to Asolo in bygone days?

"I unite, you will see, the disconnected poems by a title-name popularly ascribed to the inventiveness of the ancient Secretary of Queen Cornaro, whose palace-tower still overlooks us : *Asolara*—'to disport in the open air, amuse oneself at random.'

"The objection that such a word nowhere occurs in the works of the Cardinal is hardly important. Bembo was too thorough a purist to conserve in print a term which in talk we might possibly toy with, but the word is more likely derived from a Spanish source. I use it for love of the place, and in requital of your pleasant assurance that an early poem

of mine first attracted you thither—where and elsewhere at La Mura, as Ca Alvisi, may all happiness attend you.

“Gratefully and affectionately yours,

“R. B.

“ASOLO: *October 15, 1889.*”

In 1880 Browning and his sister had been introduced to an American, Mrs. Arthur Bronson. Thenceforward Mrs. Bronson's hospitable salon was open to them; she later fitted up a little summer retreat for herself at Asolo, where the poet and his sister had a neighbouring lodging, dining each evening with Mrs. Bronson. His dream was to possess a dwelling, however small, at Asolo which would place him above the necessity of seeking a new summer resort. He was suddenly fascinated by the desire of buying a piece of ground and altering the small building upon it with the help of his son, the completed structure to be called “Pippa's Tower.”

To his brother-in-law, George Moulton Barrett, he wrote, October 22nd, 1889, dated Asolo :

“MY DEAR GEORGE,—It was a great pleasure to get your kind letter. We have been for six weeks or more in this little place, which strikes me,—as it did fifty years ago, which is something to say, considering that, properly speaking, it was the first spot of Italian soil I ever set foot upon—having proceeded to Venice by sea—and thence here.”

In the Prologue of “Asolando,” Browning records his love for Asolo, his burning memories of Asolo; the outlook of his age in comparison with the fiery dawn of his life : leaves the record of the time when his eye :

“Involved with alien glow
My own soul's iris-bow.

“How many a year, my Asolo,
Since—one step just from sea to land—
I found you, loved yet feared you so—
For natural objects seemed to stand
Palpably fire-clothed! No—

“ No mastery of mine o’er these!
Terror with beauty, like the Bush
Burning but unconsumed. Bend knees,
Drop eyes to earthward! Language? Tush!
Silence ’tis awe decrees.

“ And now? The lambent flame is—where?
Lost from the naked world; earth, sky,
Hill, vale, tree, flower—Italia’s rare
O’er-running beauty crowds the eye—
But flame? The Bush is bare.

“ Hill, vale, tree, flower—they stand distinct,
Nature to know and name. What then?
A Voice spoke thence which straight unlinked
Fancy from fact: see, all’s in ken:
Has once my eyelid winked?

“ No, for the purged ear apprehends
Earth’s import, not the eye late dazed:
The Voice said, ‘ Call my works thy friends!
At Nature dost thou shrink amazed?
God is it who transcends.’ ”

ASOLO: *September 6, 1889.*

The poem of “Inapprehensiveness” relates to that legend of Asolo bound up in the history of the ruins; the story of that ancient castle when the residence of the beautiful Caterino Cornaro. The poem pictures two friends—the Queen and her Cardinal—gazing out at the view over the Alpine valleys to the sea at the far Euganean hills. Venice with its cupolas and steeples is on the horizon, the blue line of the Adriatic beyond; behind, to the north, copper peaks of Alps arise in majestic grandeur. The lady touches lightly on the facts of Nature around; she is inapprehensive of the passion of the man beside her—so far is one soul from another, says the poem.

“ Rosny ” is a poem of man’s sacrifice for love—love sacrificial, apparently rash, imprudent. The end is death, but death accounted victor. Love—youthful, beautiful in its simplicity, simple human love—is the note of many of these poems. Age had not withered the heart; the sap of spring wells up in these poems of a poet’s age. In

"*Summum Bonum*" is concentrated perfection after perfection of Nature's making, till the consummation, the quintessence of life, says the poet, lies in the truth and trust, the love of a young girl. When a man utters the word that evokes this pearl, the love of a girl, says the poem "A Pearl a Girl," then is he creation's lord. An Eastern fable has it that power to evoke magic lies in the pearl: utter the right word, and a spirit emerges from the gem, giving power over heaven and earth—so emerges power to man from the soul of a girl. And yet, says the poem "Speculative," could all the inspirations and delights of the past accumulate, what would they produce? Heaven may be just that, as the poem "The Last Ride Together" speculated—"the instant made Eternity."

Summum bonum is a Latin phrase meaning the chief or ultimate good; and this, says the poem, rises through all the concentrated sweetnesss of Nature: through the condensation of all Nature's chemistry; through the earth's condensation to life; through the beauty of the pearl the wonder miracle of sea-life; the carbon of coal with all the ages of imprisoned splendour of sun and forest. Through pinnacles of wonder of Nature's production the ascent is traced, but the wonder of woman's heart and soul, in its truth and trust, the *summum bonum* of life: all is for man, in the kiss of a girl.

And, says the poem "Dubiety," perhaps just this uncertainty in love, this suspense the lover knows, this ever-reaching strain to perfection never attained, may be the true atmosphere man must have. Memory of the past, hope for the future, are lures to love, "for love is truth"; and here, and instantly, truth is realised, says the poem "Now"—that moment eternal, the triumphant note of so much of the poet's work; the moment one and infinite, unforeseen, unpremeditated, gone as soon as arrived, but the minute's test when love's die is cast or hate's fruit expressed—be love the fruit or hate the fruit, "it forwards the general deed of man" ("By the Fireside"). Yet so

humble is love, says the poem " Humility," that it cherishes the very bud of the carelessly carried freight the young girl carries : " So give your lover," says the poet, " heaps of love."

And yet, because the eyes of love are blind, and the singer condemns the lover for calling his love " my rose, my swan," or likens her to the moon, yet, says the poet, it fails the mark. There is no balm in the breath of the rose ; no swan's neck has whiter curve than his love's ; he is not afraid of the moon's comparison—his love is her human self, no simile will describe her. " Poetics " pale before reality.

" White Witchcraft " is love's magic, as black magic is hate's wand. Human power is as subject to the black magic of hate as the white witchcraft of love. The witch, the sorceress, invert the craft of love. The poem expresses what form of the magic two speakers in the poem would work : the black one to turn his friend into a fox ; the other, a lady, to turn her friend into a toad.

Yet the poet has seen love in the eyes of a toad, says the poem. In the *Life* by Mrs. Sutherland Orr is related the fact of the poet's pet of early life—the toad that burrowed under a rose-tree in his garden. " Each day he visited his pet, dropping a piece of gravel into its hole, at which the toad responded by crawling forth to have its head gently tickled, rewarding the friendly act by an unmistakable glance of love from its soft full eyes " : as recalled in the poem :

" He's loathsome, I allow :

There may or may not lurk a pearl beneath his puckered
brow ;

But see his eyes that follow mine—love lasts there, any-
how."

But there are bad dreams in fear of loss of love, say the poems " Bad Dreams," 1, 2, 3, and 4. In one dream the lover sees change in the face of the loved one : there is estrangement, want of faith ; but love is still love for him. He dreams of a dance when man's sneer met woman's

curse. He creeps aside and finds himself in a chapel—a strange form of worship, and unknown priest. The dreamer sees his wife enter to confess: what was the stain she had contracted? But it is only a dream: still, what are dreams? asks the poem. Are they suppressed evil thoughts taking shape? Does the soul, freed from day's disguises, wander free during the sleep of night to disport in freedom as gases rise?

But dreams beautiful, too, says the third dream—magnified nature, glorified art—may turn to horror. Love may die and be interred, as in the shadowland of the fourth dream—that internment of love in his dream. Why? questions the once lover. How did it happen? Was he critical, cold? What ground is there for the remorse her death brings? But this bad dream of the burial of love may have its waking effect.

The poem "The Cardinal and the Dog" is a bad dream, a waking dream—the obsession of a man overstrained and ill, whose terror was a black dog, an imaginary dog, a delusion of a dog, a dog that haunted him on his death-bed: a tale of the horror that imagination can raise in minds out of order, the bad dream that comes to stay, the terrifying delusion of a distempered fancy, the loss of control by the reason, the usurping of control by a false conception carried on the wings of mighty imagination.

This poem belongs to the period of the "Pied Piper of Hamelin"; it had thus lain in the poet's desk for nearly forty years. What other poems, maybe, had also been drawn from the recesses of the desk to form the complement of these later series of poems? This speculation is idle, although conjecture may point to the dewy freshness of the confessions of young love as similarly drawn forth from the desk.

The poem "The Cardinal and the Dog" was written for that "W. M. the Younger," for whom the "Pied Piper of Hamelin" was written, in response a second time to the request of the child for a poem to illustrate.

Which form of devotion does woman really court, says the poem of three Court ladies who make—

“ Trial of all who judged best
In esteeming the love of a man.”

One lady must be next to God alone in the esteem of her lover. The second makes no reference to God or man's supreme loyalty to her; she would have a man of lofty ideals, pure thoughts, and fine deeds. The third lady has no demands to make upon her love; she asks to give, would have some poor wretch and outcast, to be for him his goal and rock of safety.

The wager, says the Abbé judging the trial, goes to this love, and—

“ Seems terribly like what perhaps gains God's preference.”

The poems “ The Pope and the Net ” and “ The Bean-Feast ” are kindred themes relating to the virtue of the great Popes, whose biographies afford such facts and fables as these; of a great Pope's zeal for his people's happiness, which took him out and among them unknown and unguessed at, to see for himself how his people fared. This great Pope of the poem had sprung from humble beginnings, said tradition, from simple fisher-folk, and, as reminder, when made Cardinal he had his father's fisher-net graven on a coat of arms and the net placed in his hall; but on attaining to the position of Pope these reminders of his humble origin were removed. But the facts as related in the poem are not considered historical.

“ The Bean-Feast ” has more historical foundation. Pope Sixtus V. is accredited with having made many such visits in disguise among his people. His reforms and great acts, his vigorous policy, his generous administration and noble autocracy, mark the period of his occupation of the Papal chair—a high-water mark both in Papal history and civil administration. In “ The Bean-Feast ” Browning opens up a glimpse into the not fabulous action only of the great Popes.

"Muckle-Mouth Meg" is a quip, and whiff of the open times and Border atmosphere conserved by Sir Walter Scott—a story of Border raids, and Border prisoners, and Border threats of gallows and dungeons. A handsome young gallant, William Scott, Lord of Harden, fell in his defeat to Sir Gideon Murray of Elibank, the victor, who ordered the young man to the gallows; but his dame interposed: the gallant should be spared if he would marry Meg, the muckle-mouthed, unpromising daughter of the Murrays. The prisoner replied he preferred the gallows to the wide-mouthed monster. But life was sweet, adventure alluring, the dungeon was cold and dark—muckle-mouthed Meg and liberty had their way.

"Arcades Ambo" and the "Lady and the Painter" touch two problems upon which Browning had no two opinions—the question of vivisection and the Nude in Art. He was Vice-President at his death of the Society for the Protection of Animals from Vivisection. In "Francis Furini" the problem of the Nude in Art is presented in its favour by Browning.

"Ponte del Angelo" (The Angel's Bridge) is a poem relating to a legend of Italy of "Our Lady" recorded in the "Glories of Mary," by St. Alphonsus Liguori. The moral of the legend is the saving efficacy of prayer to "Our Lady" as protection from the devil.

The legend of the poem relates to a lawyer who was cruel and oppressive to his clients, an extortionate but devout man. The poem relates a trick of Satan disguised as an ape, who had been placed under the Virgin's protection. A miracle of exorcism is accomplished: the fiend takes his departure. An angel figure is erected to mark the spot, the escutcheon of the house takes it as emblem, and the bridge is called the Angel's Bridge—though, says the poem, it might just as credibly have been called the Devil's Bridge.

"Beatrice Signorini" is also a story of medieval Italy—the story of a celebrated lady painter with whom another

celebrated painter, Francesco Romanelli, became enamoured, to the indignation of his wife. How the wife treated her husband's loss of interest in her the poem records, and her prompt method of replying to it—a method approved by the poet, one of whose beliefs was that weakness invites oppression.

“ Flute Music,” with accompaniment, is a poem of misconception, and misreading of people and circumstances by differing points of view, frequent in Browning's art. Here the point of view differs actually. The man is outside a wall, listening to the playing of a flute inside, and interprets the music by his own idealistic point of view. His companion, a lady, disputes his fanciful conceptions of the player : she declares he is but a drudge of the desk, who spends his hour of leisure each day practising on the flute. Distance has deceived the listener ; she asserts that his romantic interpretation is far from the everyday fact. Even so, says the poet ; but if fancy so enhances, what matter the facts beneath them ?

The poem “ Rephan ” embodies one of Browning's persistent themes in his art : that through imperfection and incompletion progress alone is possible ; that things come to perfection perish, as the Greek perfection of physique perished because of the very limitations of physical perfection which, arrived at by the Greeks as highest development, allowed no place for spiritual perfection as avenue for further theatre of progress. To stand still is man's death—to move on, life : the unlit lamp, the ungirt loin, is the prime sin of the frustrate ghost in man, says “ The Statue and the Bust.”

“ Rephan ” is a poem on similar theme, based on a story, or the suggestion from a story, heard by Browning in very early years ; as the note prefixed to the poem relates, the story of “ How it Strikes a Stranger,” by an early woman writer—Jane Taylor.

The story is of how this earth impressed a stranger, an angel from another planet, who had descended from the

star Rephan to study man even at the cost of sharing his mortality. The wanderer discourses of life on the star Rephan, of its completeness, without growth or change—no better, no worse. All is perfection : neither spring nor winter, hope nor fear ; no one man better than another, all faultless.

Why, queries the poem, did the inhabitant of Rephan become dissatisfied? Why did perfection become irksome? The stranger could not explain, but longed to know the makings and mendings of life on earth—the yearnings to another, than the neutral Best of the star. He longed to strive, not ever rest ; to burn, not smoulder ; to win by contest ; no longer counted material wealth life, sought the beyond for something better still.

Then the man had outlived Rephan, says the poem ; his place was Earth.

The poem “Development” is a recollection of Browning’s childhood—recollection of the father who was his loving instructor, who, says Mrs. Orr, taught him practically all he knew. By his father and by his father’s rare collection of books, Browning was shaped to become the poet he was ; consciously and of set purpose, the father of Browning set himself to make his son a poet, says Mrs. Sutherland Orr.

In the poem “Development” is pictured the father of the poet introducing the five-year-old child to the great poets of Greece, the tale of Troy traversed to feed the imagination of the child. In late life Browning reverted to the Greek classics as material for his art : “My father was a scholar and knew Greek,” Browning records in this poem of “Development.” He recalls the lessons at the knee of his father ; his wise method of instruction by giving him the tale of Troy as a real thing instead of, what he had to find out for himself afterwards, but a shadow of Epic life thrown by imagination.

So his father left him to sift and sort for the truth, he says at conclusion of the poem. At five years of age,

how learn otherwise than through illusion? The story of Troy is hard in its facts for five years of age, but emotion is there with which to feed a child's development. “ This taught me who was who, and what was what ”; and he gives—

“ thanks to that instructor sage
My father, who knew better than turn straight
Learning's full flare on weak-eyed ignorance.”

The poem “ Reverie ”—among the last of Browning's life—expresses explicitly his faith in the Love at the heart of the Power of God which is the culminating-point of his first poems.

The faith of Sordello of the “ Hid within the Revealed,” of faith in this as solution of all trouble “ in the earth or out of it ” (“ A Death in the Desert ”).

The poem “ Reverie ” traverses the facts of the poet's inner experience and the fancies that floated free from them—that expression of soul which, though “ cloistered fast, soars free ” by the imagination.

The poem gathers up the deep truths and faiths gleaned from his life's journey ; expresses in simple terms the two spiritual laws he postulated, and upon which he believed his genius was built.

“ I mix it with two in my thought, consider and bow the head.”

Abt Vogler.

In the poem “ Reverie ” Browning focussed his memories :

“ I know there shall dawn a day,—
Is it here on homely earth?
Is it yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
That power comes full in play?

* * * * *

“ I for my race and me
Shall apprehend life's law:
In the legend of man shall see
Writ large what small I saw
In my life's tale : both agree

“ As the record from youth to age
 Of my own, the single soul,—
 So the world's wide book : one page
 Deciphered explains the whole
 Of our common heritage.

* * * *

“ So, my annals thus begin :
 With body, to life awoke
 Soul, the immortal twin
 Of body which bore soul's yoke
 Since mortal and not akin

“ By means of the flesh, grown fit,
 Mind, in survieu of things,
 Now soared, anon alit
 To treasure its gatherings
 From the ranged expanse—to wit.

“ Nature,—earth's heaven's wide show
 Which taught all hope, all fear :
 Acquainted with joy and woe
 I could say ‘ Thus much is clear,
 Doubt annulled thus much : I know

“ ‘ All is effect of Cause :
 As it would, has willed and done
 Power : and my mind's applause
 Goes, passing laws each one
 To Omnipotence, lord of laws.’

* * * *

“ Past mind's conception—Power!
 Do I seek how star, earth, beast,
 Bird, worm, fly, gained their dower
 For life's use, most and least?
 Back from the search I cower.

* * * *

“ As promptly as mind conceives
 Let Power in its turn declare
 Some law which wrong retrieves,
 Abolishes everywhere
 What thwarts, what irks, what grieves !

* * * *

“ Why faith—but to lift the load,
 To leaven the lump, where lies
 Mind prostrate through knowledge owed
 To the loveless Power it tries
 To withstand, how vain !

* * * *

“ Then life is—to wake not sleep,
 Rise and not rest, but press
 From earth’s level where blindly creep
 Things perfected, more or less
 To the heaven’s height, far and steep.

“ Where, amid what strifes and storms
 May wait the adventurous quest,
 Power is Love—transports, transforms
 Who aspired from worst to best,
 Sought the soul’s world, spurned the worms’.

“ I have faith such end shall be :
 From the first, Power was—I knew.
 Life has made clear to me
 That, strive but for closer view,
 Love were as plain to see.

“ When see? When there dawns a day,
 If not on the homely earth,
 Then yonder, worlds away,
 Where the strange and new have birth,
 And Power comes full in play.”

The Epilogue to “Asolando” proved Browning’s last message to the world. As he read the proofs, a few days before his death, he paused at the third verse of the Epilogue—he paused to enquire of his sister and daughter-in-law if this verse seemed boastful. “Should I say this?” he asked; “shall I cancel it?”

“It is the simple truth,” he added, “it shall stand.”

In these last words to his world the poet asks its pity, pity for the struggle he has put up—the struggle involved in the Vision and the Voice confessed in his long manifestoes, the confessional poems, “Pauline,” “Paracelsus,” and “Sordello,” and the artless faith of the singer of Asolo with its mounting song of joy.

“ You’ll love me yet, sang Luigi the patriot of Asolo,
 And I can tarry your love’s protracted growing :
 June reared that bunch of flowers you carry
 From seeds of April’s sowing.

“ I plant a heartful now—some seed
 At least is sure to strike
 And yield—what you’ll not pluck indeed,
 Not love, but, maybe, like!

“ You’ll look at least on love’s remains,
 A grave’s one violet:
 Your look? that pays a thousand pains.
 What’s death? You’ll love me yet!”

In the Epilogue to “Asolando” the poet makes his last plea to the world he dedicated his genius to without thought of reward:

“ ‘Wilt thou adventure for my sake and man’s
 Apart from all reward?’

I answered not
 Knowing him. As he spoke, I was endued
 With comprehension, and a steadfast will;
 And when he ceased my brow was sealed his own.”
Paracelsus, Part I.

The Epilogue to his completed work asks only of his world:

“ At the midnight, in the silence of the sleep-time,
 When you set your fancies free,
 Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—
 Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
 Pity me?

“ O to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
 What had I on earth to do
 With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
 Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel,
 Being—who?”

What filled that hiatus? What thoughts crowded?—

“ Being—who?”

Did memory circle back to the glowing days of Asolo; to Sordello, the “slender boy in loose page’s dress,” stealing away to sit for hours before the works of art around him; to the beginning of his genius—days of the Vision and the Voice, and music’s mystery and imagination’s birth, and

passionate faith, and that simple human love compassioning the Divine?—

But the Voice lost to “ Pauline ” breathes again in “ Paracelsus ” :

“ Be happy, my good soldier; I am by thee.
Be sure even to the end ! ”

Part I.

The Prologue to “ Asolando ” reviews that glowing time of early manhood :

“ See all’s in ken :
Has once my eyelid winked ? ”

“ Pity me,” asks the Epilogue to “ Asolando ” :

“ Being—Who ? ”

As the pen travelled to fill that hiatus, one factor common to all that Protean accomplishment alone emerged :

“ Being—Who ? ”

“ One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward ;
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.”

The profession of art had been chosen by the son of Browning ; he studied steadily, and eventually settled in Venice. There Browning established him and his wife, Miss Coddington, of New York, to whom he was married October 4th, 1887. The Palazzo Rezzonico, in Venice, was purchased for them. There the poet died while visiting his son and daughter-in-law, two hours before midnight on December 12th, 1889.

Mr. Robert Wiedemann Browning and his wife were present the whole time, writes Mrs. Orr ; and in a written statement the son testifies to the general vigour and activity of his father during the last year of his life and almost to the very end :

"At an early stage of his illness," wrote Mr. R. Barrett Browning, "when the doctor first saw him he was up and dressed, standing near the fire in his sitting-room."

"He assured the doctor that his liver was out of order, but Dr. Cini pronounced it to be bronchitis and told me later his heart's action was irregular. . . . We then persuaded him to change his room for one upstairs, in order to have him near us. I was with him when he walked quickly up three flights of stairs . . . he was strong physically to the last. About two hours before the end he was unconscious and death came with a violent heaving of his big chest as he lay otherwise motionless."

"There was no pain. I believe the cause of the heart trouble to have been hardening of the arteries. . . . He repeatedly assured us he was not suffering."

Mr. Sharp writes of the—

"Superb pomp of the Venetian funeral, the solemn grandeur of the interment in Westminster Abbey. Venice has never in modern times afforded a more impressive sight than those craped processional gondolas following the high flower-strewn barge through the thronged water-ways and out across the lagoon to the desolate Isle of the Dead: London has rarely seen aught more solemn than the fog-dusked Cathedral spaces echoing at first with the slow tramp of the pallbearers."

'Amid national mourning, to the solemn chanting of his wife's poem, "He Giveth His Beloved Sleep," he was laid to his rest.

A stone in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey marks the spot where the body of Robert Browning lies; on it is a simple inscription recording his name, and the date of his birth and death.

Below this is an inscription to the memory of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, recording her dates of birth and death, with the addition that her body lies in the English cemetery at Florence.

Time has crumbled the mould of "A Grammarian's Funeral." The statue of the poet is revealed.

Again the words of the disciple chanting the praise of

the master are heard ; are heard through the soft footfall
of the poet's pall-bearers that dark day in Westminster
Abbey :

“ This is our master, famous, calm, and dead,
Borne on our shoulders.

“ Here's the top-peak : the multitude below
Live, for they can there ;
This man decided not to Live but Know,—
Bury this man there ?

“ Lofty designs must close in like effects :
Loftily lying,
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.”

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PRESS NOTICES OF

ROBERT BROWNING

THE POET AND THE MAN, 1833-1846

With which is incorporated "ROBERT BROWNING: THE POET AND THE MAN" (CENTENNIAL MONOGRAPHS, St. Catherine's Press Co.)

Daily Chronicle.—"Frances M. Sim's 'Robert Browning: the Poet and the Man, 1833-1846,' reveals in an interesting manner the early life of the poet, and presents him from an angle that is more in keeping with his poetic achievements than the majority of later portraits of the great Victorian. The story of 'Pauline' was well worth telling, and the early influences of Shelley and Dante upon the poet's work, his early ambitions, his fight against neglect, his steadfast faith and purpose are admirably reflected in this little biography, which is rounded off by the love story of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett—in itself a little novel of intense interest."

Truth Special Literary Supplement.—"Frances M. Sim's work on Browning, which covers only the first half of his life, though it tells us little, in the objective sense, about the poet that we did not know before, is nevertheless a highly interesting study, inspired throughout with the affectionate insight of a true Browning lover. Browning, of course, never attained the wide popularity of Tennyson, but in the seventies and eighties he became a cult with a large circle of devout worshippers."

Friend.—"The Victorians are certainly coming again into their own. It was only the other week that there appeared simultaneously two full-dress monographs upon Tennyson; and now we have before us a large volume devoted to thirteen of the most formative and interesting years in the life of Robert Browning. . . . There is much in it that will help the new student of Browning's poetry, and much over which—even if it be familiar—the older student will be happy to linger.

"But the most valuable part of the volume is that devoted to a descriptive analysis of Browning's poems written during the period under review—which include, of course, 'Paracelsus,' 'Sordello,' the dramatic works, 'Pippa Passes,' and a number of shorter pieces. The young student, to whom Browning is difficult or 'obscure,' will find this section of the book particularly helpful. . . . The author has taken much pains over her task of interpretation, and has freely intersprinkled the poet's own words with her own. Even 'Sordello,' in her hands, is made to yield a significance which too many have failed to wrest from it."

Otago Daily Times (Dunedin, New Zealand).—"To attempt a new work on Robert Browning calls for no small courage—the field has been so well covered and by such eminent hands, and the material available for biographical purposes has been so thoroughly investigated that anything further would seem almost a work of supererogation. Yet the subject is undoubtedly

PRESS NOTICES (*Continued*)

a tempting one, and this because of the tradition, 'already deeply embedded in English letters,' as Mr. Augustine Birrell points out, that 'Browning is a poet hard to read.' In her newly published book on 'Robert Browning: the Poet and the Man,' Mrs. W. A. Sim confines her attention to the years 1833 to 1846—that is, from the publication of 'Pauline' to Robert Browning's marriage with Elizabeth Barrett. These were years when the poet was largely in the making, and they constitute a period, therefore, of the greatest interest to all students of his poetry.

"'Robert Browning: the Poet and the Man' is likely to appeal to two classes of readers. In the first place, it forms a useful handbook for beginners who are making a first acquaintance with the poet's earlier work. In the second place, it is certain to receive attention from Browning lovers everywhere, who will find in its pages new light on, and a fresh elucidation of, the working of Robert Browning's mind. Lastly, and perhaps most important of all, literary students all over the dominion will rejoice that one has arisen able to write comprehensively and with womanly intuition on so difficult a subject as the life and poetry of a thinker and philosopher like Robert Browning."

Evening Star (Dunedin, New Zealand).—"It takes some courage to face the reading public with a new study of this 'vera deefcult author,' as an old Scotch lady described him once. But a Dunedin lady, Frances M. Sim, greatly daring, has done it. She has just issued through T. Fisher Unwin, London, 'Robert Browning: the Poet and the Man.' I happen to know that Mrs. Sim has been an ardent student of Browning for many years. As a rule ladies are shy of him. He is too tough a morsel for feminine tastes. It is good to have an exception in the case of Mrs. Sim, and in adding another volume to the hosts that have been written on Browning she has no reason to be ashamed of her work. She has brought to it the love of her subject, which is the first condition of insight into it. She has made herself familiar with the greater part of what has been written about Browning.

"Mrs. Sim has chosen to put two limitations on her work. She has confined herself to the poems issued between 1833 and 1846. . . . The other limitation that Mrs. Sim has imposed upon herself is to deal mainly with the historic background that throws light upon the poems between 1833 and 1846 and an analysis of the thought of the poems. Since Mrs. Sutherland Orr wrote her handbook much new knowledge has come to light. Mrs. Sim has made a thorough search among all relative literature, and has said, I think, the last word on this aspect of the question. Backgrounds are very essential to the understanding of a man's life and work, and this is especially so in poetic literature. The poet restricts his explanation of his thought and himself. In the case of a supreme poet like Browning this has to be sought out and set in order after his death. There is no other book that I know that has done this with the thoroughness of Mrs. Sim's, as far as it goes. She has left nothing unconsidered that would throw any ray of light on Browning's work between the dates mentioned. She has brought together from every quarter everything that would help the reader to understand the poems. For the right perspective in which to view them Mrs. Sim's book, within its compass, is unique and indispensable.

"Mrs. Sim devotes the last fifty pages of her book to 'Browning, the man.' Of course, the outstanding fact is the romantic attachment and marriage of Browning with Miss Barrett—better known now as Elizabeth Barrett Browning. This will be to many not the least interesting part of her book. And it is remarkably well done. She has had the advantage, of course, over earlier writers of the love-letters that passed between them, and which were published after their death. For those who have not the time to read longer biographies they will have an admirable outline of the course of events in Mrs.

PRESS NOTICES (*Continued*)

Sim's pages. She weaves the narrative out of the letters in a very skilful and interesting way. The characters of both husband and wife are very clearly presented. The whole story is as fascinating as a novel, with the additional attraction that it is true, adding one more illustration to the saying that 'fact is stranger than fiction.' Browning, the man, stands out an attractive figure, brave, chivalrous, honest, lovable, with that

" 'Endurance which is the crowning quality
And patience all the passion of great hearts.' "

Glasgow Herald.—"This volume covers the period of Browning's life from the publication of 'Pauline,' his first acknowledged work, until his marriage thirteen years later. It makes no pretension to be critical, but is a collection of facts regarding the poet's life and work. Many of the circumstances recorded will be new even to students and lovers of Browning, many are already known. . . . The stories of 'Pauline,' 'Paracelsus,' 'Sordello,' and the early dramatic works are told with copious interlinking quotations in the manner of those useful digests that provide culture in tabloid form. The correspondence with Elizabeth Barrett occupies a chapter, and the circumstances of her home life, her acquaintance with Browning, their engagement and marriage are faithfully chronicled."

Observer.—"The author gives a brief sketch of Browning's early life, which included a visit to Russia and periods during which medicine, diplomacy, and law were successively and characteristically contemplated as careers by this man of universal curiosity. She tells again the wonderful story of the Browning-Barrett courtship, and she analyses the early poems and dramas."

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